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SOME  
NOTABLE  
HAMLETS

CLEMENT SCOTT

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The surplus annual balance "shall be expended for books for the library."

—*Letter of Waldo Higginson,*  
*Jan. 10, 1893.*

Received ..... 7 Nov. 1900.





**SOME  
NOTABLE  
HAMLETS**



©

# SOME NOTABLE HAMLETS OF THE PRESENT TIME

(Sarah Bernhardt, Henry Irving  
Wilson Barrett, Beerbohm Tree  
and Forbes Robertson)

BY

CLEMENT SCOTT

*Author of* "The Drama of Yesterday and  
The Drama of To-day"  
"The Wheel of Life"  
"Madonna Mia"  
"Life of E. L. Blanchard"  
ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED BY W. G. MEIN*

LONDON

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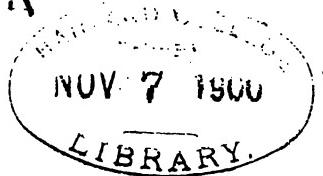
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Sophie Land

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**CLEMENT SCOTT**  
**AN APPRECIATION**

**BY**  
**L. ARTHUR GREENING**







*Walter Barmelt, Photo.*

*Alexander Scott*  
*1899*

## CLEMENT SCOTT

### AN APPRECIATION

I HAVE for many reasons had a strong desire to gather together and republish these criticisms of "Hamlet" written by Mr. Clement Scott.

My first reason for doing so is because I feel sure they will be very welcome to that large section of theatre-goers who admire the earnest dramatic work of Clement Scott, poet, playwright, essayist, novelist, and dramatic critic.

Another reason is that they will certainly form a weighty contribution towards a future history of the English stage.

And, thirdly, I hold the subject to be of sufficient importance to warrant the rescue from the limbo of old newspapers of these critiques of some of the most notable performances of Shakespeare's masterpiece our age has seen.

It is known to me that application for permission to read Mr. Scott's celebrated first night notices are of frequent occurrence by earnest students of the stage.

I also know that were the issues of the *Daily Telegraph* in which they appeared now in print they would have been sold over and over again.

It was at my urgent request that Mr. Clement Scott consented to the republication of his "Hamlet" criticisms. They are now reprinted exactly as he wrote them, at high pressure, in the space of about one hour, after performances which were often not over until midnight. It is necessary that a dramatic critic's first night notice is ready for the printer before half-past one. These rapidly thought out and swiftly written descriptive impressions convey a more vivid and accurate understanding of the remarkable performances to which they refer than could any sober, well-studied, critical essay on the ethics of the tragedy, in which so often an egotistical writer flaunts his knowledge of Shakespeare rather than gives an account of the production under his consideration.

Reading these "Irving," "Tree," "Barrett,"

and "Forbes Robertson" notices will bring back freshly to the memory of many playgoers the interest, the excitement, and the enthusiasm of some memorable "Hamlet" premiers.

An enthusiast of the theatre, Clement Scott writes enthusiastically, and, what is more, manages to transmit his enthusiasm to his reader. But he also writes thoughtfully, conscientiously, and with judgment. For these reasons his critiques are of value.

To Mr. Scott's criticisms (he modestly calls them "notices") of these famous English Hamlets I have added some portraits and the full casts of each production, and trust they will be found interesting and valuable. I have also thought it advisable to include a short article (which appeared in the *New York Herald*) on Madame Sarah Bernhardt's impersonation of Hamlet at the Adelphi Theatre. Furthermore, I have added the notice of Sir Henry Irving's revival of "Hamlet" after his return from America in 1885, as being interesting in comparison with his first performance of the character, also because on this occasion a remarkable demonstration occurred in opposition

to Sir Henry's attempt to please his gallery patrons by booking their seats in advance.

Having now explained my object in publishing this volume, it occurs to me that a slight sketch of Mr. Clement Scott's career, and a few remarks on his work, may prove of some interest and form a suitable introduction to his impressions of "Some Famous Hamlets."

Clement Scott was born at Christ Church Parsonage, Hoxton, on October 6th, 1841. His father was the Rev. W. Scott, Vicar of St. Olave's, Old Jewry, a literary and journalistic clergyman who was well known as "Parson Scott of Hoxton," and who was one of the original staff of the *Saturday Review*, which then included, among other brilliant writers, Lord Salisbury, Sir William Harcourt, John Morley, Mrs. Lynn Linton, Leslie Stephen, T. H. S. Escott, and John Ruskin. Truly a goodly company.

"Parson Scott," like his son, must have been a very glutton for work, for in the "fifties" not only was he incumbent of Christ Church, Hoxton, with two services every day and three on Sunday to attend to, besides the accompanying parish work, but he was also a vigorous

pamphleteer on religious subjects, a daily leader writer on the *Morning Chronicle*, and editor of the *Christian Remembrancer*.

When the *Saturday* started he contributed social leaders on subjects of the hour, and reviews of all books that appealed to him. We can thus trace hereditary influence in Clement Scott's well-known and surprising energy for literary work.

Clement Scott was educated at Marlborough College, after attending a preparatory school situated in Theberton Street, Islington, which was kept by a rather celebrated old dominie, George Darnell, of copybook fame. Old Darnell, who was a stern disciplinarian, was incurably lame and walked with the aid of two stout sticks, with which he belaboured the dull and ignorant of his pupils.

From the old dominie school to Marlborough College was a great change, and Mr. Scott looks back on his old Marlborough days as some of the happiest of his life. He is proud of being an "old Marlburian," and cherishes many affectionate memories of his old school and schoolmasters,  
—Dr. Bradley and the Rev. G. L. Cotton.

He left Marlborough in 1859, and attended Civil Service classes at King's College. In 1860, when about eighteen years old, he obtained, by one of the first open competitions, a clerkship in the War Office, Pall Mall, to which he was nominated by Lord Herbert of Lea, whose statue now stands in the courtyard of the War Office.

In his boyhood's days the future leader writer and dramatic critic was passionately fond of writing and of theatres, and he was a constant contributor of poems, essays, and descriptive papers to his school magazine, *The Marlburian*. He was also an enthusiastic amateur actor, though he always speaks in a very deprecatory way of his youthful performances. Among the future critic's companions in his amateur days were Mr. W. S. Gilbert and Mr. J. M. Molloy, the writer of many popular ballads.

At the War Office he soon became fast friends with a fellow-clerk, who helped to introduce the young aspirant to journalistic life. This was Tom Hood the younger.

Clement Scott started his career as a journalist in a rather disastrous fashion. He answered an advertisement asking for a com-

petent dramatic critic, leader writer, and book reviewer for a paper to be called the *Victorian Press*. To his surprise, he obtained the post at a salary of £5 per week, and mightily proud was he of his position. For weeks he worked like a nigger, but his promised £5 a week was never paid, though compliments on his ability and industry were showered on him by the proprietor of the paper, who borrowed £25 of the too-confiding young Clement (his quarter's salary from the War Office) to pay a persistent printer. A few days after, when he went to the office, he found the shutters up. The *Victorian Press* had ceased to exist, and all he had received for his work was the proprietor's worthless I.O.U. for the loan of £25.

After that Clement Scott did some "devil-living" for other dramatic critics, and spent most of his nights at the play. Tom Robertson, who was then dramatic critic for the *Sunday Times*, and Charles J. Dunphie, on the *Morning Post*, often put work in his way. Then he wrote for the *Era* a weekly column of gossip, comment, and criticism. This was

his first regular employment on an important theatrical paper.

Next, in 1863, he became dramatic critic for the *Sunday Times*, at the magnificent salary of £2 per week. He afterwards filled the same position on the *Weekly Dispatch* and the *Observer*, and was the original "Almaviva" when Mr. James Mortimer started the *Figaro*.

In 1872 he joined the editorial staff of the *Daily Telegraph* as leader writer and dramatic critic.

All this time, it must be remembered, he was still a clerk in the War Office, where he stayed until 1879, when he retired on a pension, and devoted himself entirely to literary work.

Since he joined the staff of the *Telegraph* Mr. Scott has been principally identified with that great daily, but he has contributed to almost every paper of any importance, and editors are always proud to include a signed article by Clement Scott in their journals. A list of the papers to which he has from time to time contributed would fill a couple of pages of this volume.

Poems, stories, criticism, and descriptive articles flowed from his facile and brilliant pen, for there is no more rapid worker than Mr. Scott on the whole London Press. It is not generally known how much work he did for the *Telegraph* in addition to his dramatic criticism. He wrote innumerable eloquent leaders on all sorts of subjects, and his vivid descriptions of Royal weddings, Royal funerals, drawing-rooms, levees, cricket matches, races, celebrated criminal trials, and such-like events and functions, added not a little to the popularity of the *Daily Telegraph*. All the most important ceremonies of the never-to-be-forgotten Jubilee were entrusted to Clement Scott, and right well he carried out his trust.

His always charming, fresh, and breezy summer articles can never be forgotten by lovers of impressionist descriptions of English scenery. He has described in his own inimitable style almost every watering-place and country nook in the United Kingdom. He was the veritable discoverer of "Poppyland," and all those surrounding lovely spots for which East Anglia is now celebrated. For this alone

Mr. Scott deserves the thanks of the thousands of jaded workers who have regained health, strength, and vitality from a holiday in the beautiful "Poppyland." He sings very sweetly of this arcadia in his popular song, "The Garden of Sleep," and also in other pieces.

In 1892 Clement Scott was commissioned by the proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph* to describe the wonders of the World's Fair, Chicago. On the eve of his departure he was entertained at a banquet at the Garrick Club, when all the most notable people in the theatrical and journalistic world were present to give him a hearty send-off, wishing him God-speed and a safe return. To get to Chicago he made a tour of the world, going through Europe, Egypt, India, China, Japan, and the great American cities. While going round the world to the World's Fair he wrote for the *Telegraph* a series of delightfully entertaining letters, which attracted an immense amount of attention.

For many years, in addition to his work for daily and weekly papers, Mr. Scott was editor of the *Theatre* magazine, and conducted it

with very great success. In that capacity he it was who discovered and encouraged the budding genius of Miss Marie Corelli. It was also as editor of the *Theatre* that he found literary talent in the early work of the Comtesse de Brémont, who has since gained fame as a poet and novelist. In 1891 he edited *The Life and Reminiscences of E. L. Blanchard*, whom he had succeeded as the principal dramatic critic of the *Daily Telegraph*.

In 1896 the proprietors of the *Telegraph* paid Mr. Scott a special compliment by engaging his exclusive services as dramatic critic. He was the acknowledged head of London's stage analysts, and he was and is in every way well fitted to fill the post. His brilliantly written, thoughtful, and fearless "first night notices" were and are the wonder and admiration of his rivals—or, to be correct, his would-be rivals—for rivals Mr. Scott has none. Being above all rivalry in his particular line, carpers and petty scribblers are powerless to injure his reputation as a fair-dealing and generally impartial dramatic critic, who is more ready to praise than blame. Mr. Scott never toadies. When

censure is necessary he censures trenchantly, and in a straightforward, manly way.

Early in 1898 came the regrettable incident of Mr. Scott's denunciation of the morality of the stage as a profession for women, in the *Great Thoughts* interview, "Does the Theatre make for Good?" This, it will be remembered, was written by Mr. Raymond Blathwayt.

The occurrence caused an enormous amount of discussion concerning the inner and private lives of actresses, which, as a matter of fact, concern no one but the actresses themselves and the profession they adorn. At this time Mr. Clement Scott was about the best-abused man in theatrical circles. By some he has not yet been forgiven.

The truth about the *Great Thoughts* interview has yet to be written, and when it is made public some surprise will be felt by those who were bitterest in their abuse of Clement Scott.

Apropos of this so-called "scandal," I should here like to repeat what was told me by more than one man in *the* profession—men who know the stage inside and out. "Yes," they said, in conversation on the then burning sub-

ject, "it's all true, but *Clement Scott* need not have said it." I don't suppose much good or much harm was done to the theatre, in spite of all the hysteria of the time, and I doubt not but that the whole affair is regretted by no one more than it is by Mr. Scott.

In the beginning of 1899, after nearly thirty years' constant work for the *Telegraph*—daily, nightly, hourly, death-dealing drudgery, which shattered his health—*Clement Scott*, not lightly, but after serious consideration, decided to resign his position, take a much-needed rest, and then devote himself to other and less worrying paths in literature. His resignation of such a coveted position as the chief dramatic critic of the most influential paper in the world caused much surprise to many people, and among others to Sir Edward Lawson, the popular editor and proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*, who wrote thus to his old friend :—

*"My dear Clement,—If I may be permitted to express an opinion, I think you are making a great mistake, and I advise you to reconsider your decision."*

*"You never were more able than now to discharge your duty as dramatic critic, and I think you take a*

*very hazardous step in commencing a new career at your time of life. But if, my dear friend, you are fixed in your conclusion, I can only say I should accept your resignation with the greatest regret. Always sincerely yours,*

*"EDWARD LAWSON."*

The first product of Mr. Scott's more leisured moments is his long-promised and eagerly-expected work on the English drama entitled *The Stage of Yesterday and the Stage of To-day*, which, as I write, is passing through the press.\* In this, his *magnum opus*, Mr. Scott tells the story of the English stage for the last fifty years, and there can be no doubt but that it will prove to be one of the most valuable and interesting works on the subject ever written.

In addition to his work as dramatic critic, essayist, poet, and descriptive journalist, Clement Scott has found time to adapt and write many plays, and quite a small library of books has to be placed to his credit.

\* Since the above was written, Mr. Scott's book has been published by Messrs. Macmillan in this country, also in America, and, it is hardly necessary to say, was at once voted, by both English and American critics, a monumental work of the greatest interest and value.

I will first briefly record his plays, and afterwards deal with his books with equal brevity.

The first play to which Mr. Scott put his name, in fact, the first he ever wrote, was a little piece called *Off the Line*. This was produced at the Gaiety Theatre in April, 1871. Mr. J. L. Toole was the original engine-driver, "Harry Coke." The young critic-dramatist's first play was a success, and proved the forerunner of a long list of popular plays from his versatile pen.

One of the most successful plays with which Clement Scott's name is connected is *Peril*, which he adapted from Sardou's *Nos Intimes* in collaboration with Mr. B. C. Stephenson. It was produced in September, 1876, at the old Prince of Wales's Theatre under the management of Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft. A clever, well-written, and interesting drama, no wonder it drew all London to the little playhouse in Tottenham Court Road. An equal success awaited *Peril* when the Bancrofts revived it at the Haymarket Theatre in February, 1884, and Mrs. Langtry made the piece one of her chief successes at the Prince's Theatre in April, 1885. *Peril* is a play that will always stand revival.

In January, 1878, at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, Sardou's drama *Dora* was produced in an English dress under the title of *Diplomacy*, the adaptation being announced as "by Savile Rowe and Bolton Rowe." *Diplomacy* scored a very big success, and was highly praised by both Press and public. Mr. Joseph Knight said in the *Athenæum* :—

"The adapters have discharged their task competently, and have produced a play which, while it is suited to English requirements, is not less dramatic, less sympathetic, nor less powerful than the original. It might be maintained indeed that one at least of the alterations that has been made is an improvement. The success of the performance was complete; the hold of the drama upon the audience was never relaxed, and the stronger situations provoked loud outbursts of applause. . . . Remarkable tact has been shown in the general task of adaptation, and the central figures are thoroughly and characteristically English. It is satisfactory to add that the interpretation was worthy of the play."

This was high praise indeed from so stern, shrewd, and level-headed a critic as Mr. Knight. The company included Messrs. Bancroft, W. H.

Kendal, John Clayton, Arthur Cecil, and Charles Sugden; Mrs. Bancroft, Mrs. Kendal, and Miss Le Thiérre.

In November, 1884, *Diplomacy* was revived at the Haymarket Theatre with Miss Calhoun, Mrs. Bernard Beere, Mrs. Bancroft, Miss Le Thiérre, Messrs. Bancroft, Forbes Robertson, C. H. E. Brookfield, and Maurice Barrymore in the cast. The drama secured a very marked success on its revival, and the adapters were no longer disguised as "Savile Rowe and Bolton Rowe," but frankly declared themselves as Clement Scott and B. C. Stephenson.

For Mrs. Kendal Mr. Scott wrote a sympathetic and dramatic little one-act play called *The Cape Mail*. It was produced at the St. James's Theatre on November 27th, 1881, and has frequently been revived since. It is a capital little piece, and afforded Mrs. Kendal a fine opportunity for displaying her capabilities as an actress of pathetic characters.

In conjunction with Mr. Wilson Barrett, Mr. Scott wrote a pretty, effective, and unconventional play called *Sister Mary*, which proved decidedly popular at the Comedy Theatre in

September, 1886, with Miss Lingard and Mr. Leonard Boyne in the principal parts.

In February, 1887, Clement Scott collaborated with his old friend Mr. George R. "Dagonet" Sims in a four-act musical drama for Miss Fannie Leslie. *Jack-in-the-Box*, as the piece was called, proved a popular production, and was played with immense success by Miss Leslie in the provinces and in London at the Strand Theatre.

In June, 1891, an English version, by Clement Scott, of Georges Ohnet's gloomy but interesting play *Serge Panine* was successfully produced at the Avenue Theatre, with Miss Genieve Ward in the leading part. The adaptation, which was originally written for Mrs. Langtry, was acknowledged to be clever, skilful, and dramatic. It was received with warm approval.

In August, 1895, *The Swordsman's Daughter*, a melodrama by Clement Scott and Brandon Thomas, was successfully produced at the Adelphi Theatre, and provided the late Mr. William Terriss with a strong part, rather different from the youthful heroic rôles in which he had grown so familiar to Adelphi audiences.

In this play poor Terriss showed his versatility by playing the part of a grey-haired, dignified old French swordsman. *The Swordsman's Daughter* provided a popular Adelphi success, and ran for more than four months.

*The Vicarage* is the title of a pleasantly written adaptation by Clement Scott of Feuillet's *Le Village*, which was last performed in London at the Garrick Theatre in December, 1894, with Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft and Mr. Arthur Cecil in the principal rôles. It was originally produced at the old Prince of Wales's Theatre on March 31st, 1877, when Mrs. Bancroft, Mr. W. H. Kendal, and Mr. Arthur Cecil acted therein.

For Miss Olga Nethersole Mr. Scott wrote a version of Dumas' drama *Denise*. This was first played at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, Birmingham, in August, 1895, and Miss Nethersole has produced it successfully in America.

Mr. Clement Scott has written the lyrics for several pantomimes, comic operas, and musical pieces, and he has not disdained to write popular music-hall songs. Of the latter "Here Stands a Post," with music by W. C. Levey, will

be best remembered. Of the former I chiefly recollect *The Little Duke* of years ago and *The Lily of Leoville* at the Comedy, and Miss Minnie Palmer's pantomime *Cinderella* at the old Her Majesty's Theatre in 1889.

Clement Scott's books are many and varied. They embrace poetry, fiction, essays, and criticism. His most popular volumes of verse are *Lays and Lyrics* and the *Lays of a Londoner*, both containing some very charming pieces of a high order of merit, many of which have attained great popularity.

His volumes of descriptive essays and impressionist sketches of country and seaside resorts, *Poppyland*, *Sisters by the Sea*, *Round about the Islands*, and *Among the Apple Orchards*, are well known and always in request. No English writer of to-day can write more charmingly, fascinatingly, and interestingly about the seaside and the country than can Clement Scott. He possesses in a remarkable degree the happy knack of being able to transport his readers in imagination to the beautiful scenes he so enthusiastically describes.

*Cheery Ceylon* and *Pictures of the World*

are volumes of travel which are delightfully reminiscent of his trip when globe-trotting in 1892. The latter has run through three editions, and can be read again and again with interest, instruction, and amusement.

One of his most popular books is *The Wheel of Life*, a most interesting little volume of reminiscences of men and women he has known, plays he has seen, and places he has visited. Mr. Clement Scott's books of criticism include *Thirty Years at the Play* and *From the Bells to King Arthur*, the latter being, as indeed the title suggests, a complete descriptive and critical record of the magnificent productions Sir Henry Irving has staged at the Lyceum Theatre from 1871 to 1895.

*Madonna Mia* is a collection of pathetic and humorous stories told in Mr. Scott's own sympathetic and entertaining style. For the future he promises another volume of reminiscences, *People, Plays, and Places*, his history of the stage called *The Stage of Yesterday and the Stage of To-day*, a couple of long novels, a volume giving his *Impressions of America*, and a life of Ellen Terry.



It can fall to the lot of but few men to be the most popular and the most influential dramatic critic in the greatest city in the world for a period of more than thirty years. That this enviable and distinguished position has been worthily earned and held by Mr. Clement Scott is not to be disputed even by his bitterest enemies, and Mr. Scott's warmest admirers cannot shut their eyes to the fact that he *has* many bitter enemies who display their malignity on every possible occasion.

However, every successful man makes enemies, no matter what his profession may be. To make enemies is one of the penalties of success. Mr. Clement Scott can therefore well afford to treat with contempt those petty detractors whose jealousy can do no harm except to their own hapless reputations. It is a pity that Mr. Scott's impulsiveness permits him to cross swords with foemen so little worthy of his steel. For him to bandy words with the obscure and ignorant scribes who so frequently attack him is only to give them just the notoriety and self-advertisement they seek.

In no other branch of the journalistic and

literary profession is a man so likely to make enemies as in the department of dramatic criticism. It is next to impossible to avoid giving offence at times if the critic be honest, fearless, conscientious, and enthusiastic. The vanity of actors and actresses is too well known to need any reiteration here, and there is no reason to doubt but that dramatic authors are equally vain about the productions of their brain. It is all a natural resultant of continual public applause and foolish theatrical hero-worship. Therefore the critic who is called upon to sit in judgment on their work is in constant danger of incurring their displeasure if that work calls for condemnation rather than for praise.

During his many years' service to the English stage Mr. Clement Scott has been compelled, in the interest of the art he so dearly loves, to mete out severe criticism, to condemn bad plays and bad acting, and has thus trodden upon the corns of overpraised and conceited performers and careless writers. The idea that he would rather blame than praise cannot be entertained for one minute. A man so full of

sincere and genuine enthusiasm for the theatre would be only too pleased when the chance occurred for him to "praise! praise! praise!" to quote Mr. Pinero's dictum.

There can be no doubt, "no possible doubt whatever," that the present high position of the English stage is due in no small measure to critics like Mr. Clement Scott, Mr. Moy Thomas, Mr. Joseph Knight, Mr. William Archer, and others who have for years fought shoulder to shoulder to uphold the Dramatic Art, to encourage good plays and good acting, and to condemn in no uncertain terms mediocrity and incompetence.

Mr. Scott has never been afraid to use the sternest severity in his attitude towards what his experience and judgment have told him to be unworthy. As representing a paper of such importance as the *Daily Telegraph*, the influence he exercised in theatrical affairs was enormous, and when at one time he was dramatic critic of *Truth* and the *Illustrated London News*, as well as of the *Telegraph*, it is needless to say his power was unparalleled. Strange to say, though Mr. Scott in his

brilliantly written and fearless critiques has so often trenchantly censured actors and dramatists, yet his most tenacious and bitterest foes are not members of the theatrical profession, but rather are to be found among the lower class of workers in the journalistic vineyard. The fact is curious.

The cause of this is surely not far to seek. It can be attributed to envy alone. Clement Scott has valiantly fought his way upwards from the bottom rung of the literary ladder, and his success is thoroughly well deserved. He has in some of his books and in his many interesting newspaper and magazine articles told some of the stories of his early trials and struggles, and when his autobiography comes to be written, a work of very great interest cannot fail to be the result. Among the things he will probably not tell, however, will be the many spontaneous acts of kindness he has shown to struggling actors and poor journalists, how he has often been that friend indeed who is a friend in need. How many a now successful actor and prosperous pressman owe their position to-day to

Clement Scott's timely and generous help! No; these things will be told of him hereafter.

Clement Scott has in his life made mistakes—as, indeed, who has not?—but they have been mistakes of the head rather than of the heart. His greatest fault is a very impulsive temperament, but his impulse is generally to do good rather than the reverse. His popularity has known its ups and downs. He has been cheered on first nights, and he has been hissed and execrated upon occasion. But when a fickle-minded section of the public forgot and degraded themselves so far as to hiss and hoot their favourite critic, they overlooked the fact that they showed their resentment because he had been honest and fearless in his remarks, and not afraid to speak the truth and shame the devil. It is perfectly absurd, because a critic feels it his duty to censure a spoiled darling of the public for a bad performance or a bad play, for that public to turn and rend the man who by his criticism only spurs on “the spoiled darling” to do better things. It was cowardly. It was mean. It showed want of intelligence to hiss a critic for doing his duty. However,

let bygones be bygones. It is hardly likely to occur again.

\* \* \* \* \*

A few more words and I am done, and I can only hope this plain, matter-of-fact "appreciation" of a clever and often misjudged man will have been found not uninteresting.

When Mr. Scott resigned his position on the *Daily Telegraph* he was at once offered the post of dramatic critic on several influential papers. But none of these flattering offers were accepted, as he needed the rest he left the *Telegraph* to obtain. However, Clement Scott is much too energetic to long remain idle, so off he went to Biarritz, where he wrote his *magnum opus*, *The Stage of Yesterday and the Stage of To-day*, to which I have already referred. This completed, he accepted the position of London dramatic critic to the *New York Herald*, his criticisms being cabled across the Atlantic. It may be of interest here to note, as a sample of Yankee enterprise, that a vivid, critical, and descriptive account of the production of Sardou's *Robespierre* at the

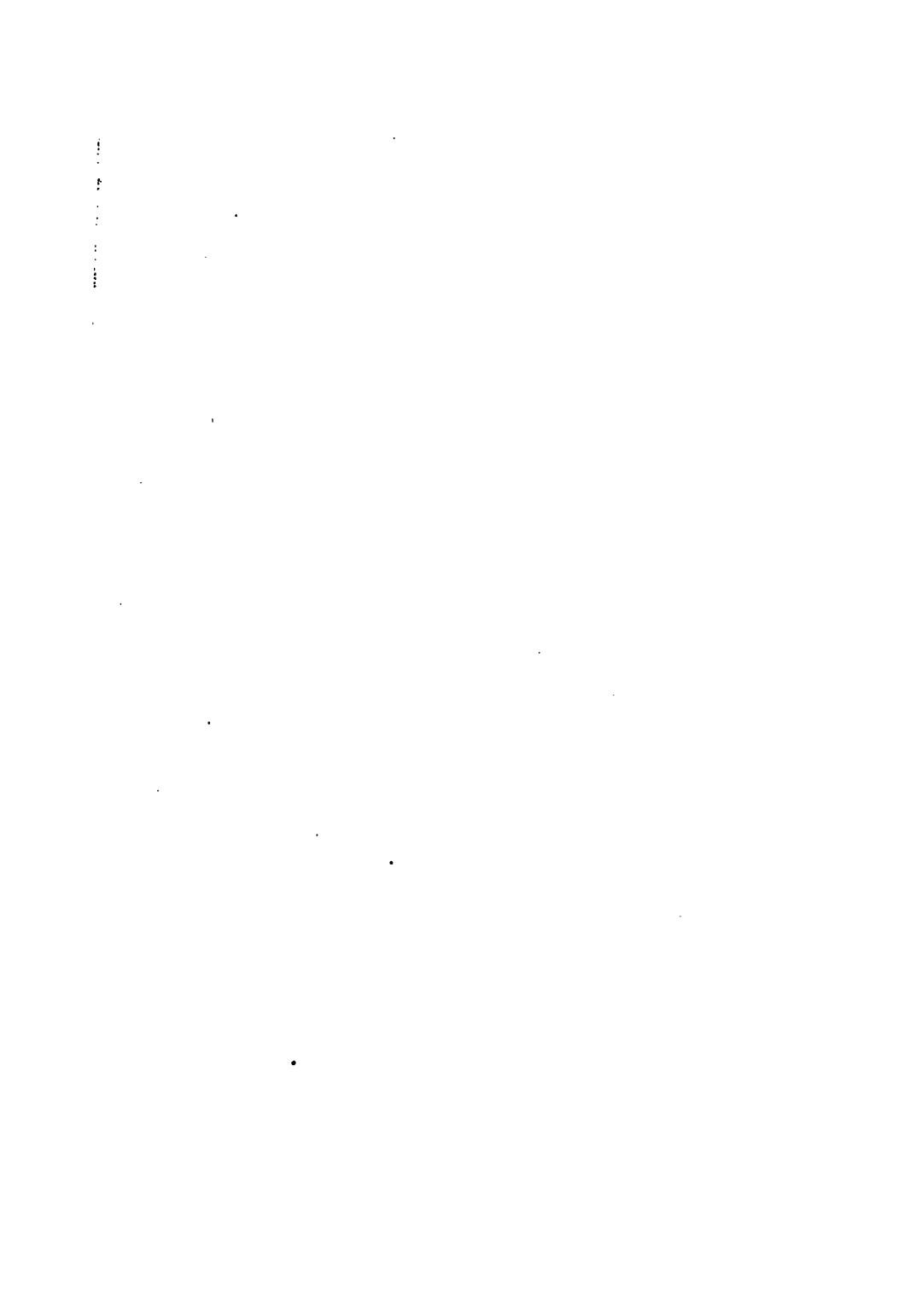
Lyceum Theatre, consisting of about 3,000 words, appeared in the *New York Herald* the morning after, simultaneously with the notices in our London papers.

On September 30th, 1899, Mr. and Mrs. Scott sailed from England for America, whither he went to study the American stage, and write fearlessly and honestly about American actors and American plays.

In America Clement Scott is now representing the *New York Herald*, and his friends are all delighted to know that his success in the New World was immediate and genuine. He had the heartiest of hearty welcomes from the best literary circles in New York. The "great English critic," as the Americans call him, is everywhere popular, and his clever work is praised and appreciated as much in the "Land of the Stars and Stripes" as it is here in England.

L. ARTHUR GREENING.

LONDON: 1900.





SARAH BERNHARDT

SARAH BERNHARDT

1899

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## SARAH BERNHARDT

ADELPHI THEATRE, JUNE 12, 1899

I PERFECTLY agree with M. Coquelin, the actor critic, that the French temperament should be exhibited in Hamlet as well as the English temperament. But why stop short at the French temperament? Shakespeare wrote for all men, all times, all ages, all nations. He is the poet of humanity.

In Hamlet I have seen countless temperaments. I have not only used Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* as a kind of text-book on Hamlet, but have seen the celebrated Emil Devrient, supposed to be the greatest German Hamlet who

#### 44 SOME NOTABLE "HAMLETS"

ever lived. I have seen the Italian temperament exhibited as Hamlet by Rossi and Salvini. Salvini's death scene as the Prince of Denmark, with the "Kiss me, Hardy" effect from Lord Nelson's death on board the *Victory*, was infinitely beautiful, perhaps the best of all the death scenes in *Hamlet*.

The English temperament was best shown by Henry Irving and Forbes Robertson, for they both depicted the dreamer, the scholar, the philosopher, the student, the Prince. Their immediate predecessors forced the tragic note which they could not strike, and forgot the humour and the comedy. Accordingly, Phelps, Charles Kean, and Barry Sullivan cannot be counted among the great Hamlets of our time. Wilson Barrett and Beerbohm Tree were more fantastic

than original. They acted intelligently, but did not wholly convince anybody in the audience. They were deficient in style.

The American temperament was shown with some brilliancy and effect by Edwin Booth. It was a clever actor's Hamlet.

Three Hamlets brought out with superb effect the French temperament. These were Mounet Sully, Charles Fechter, and Sarah Bernhardt. Of these three I give the palm to Charles Fechter, who, as a Frenchman, acted in English, with Sarah Bernhardt bracketed almost equal. It were difficult to bracket the two in merit.

The majority of English Hamlets, Irving and Forbes Robertson excepted, force the tragedy and ignore the comedy. The charm of the two best French

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Hamlets consists in that dominant note of comedy, that rare vein of humour, that eccentric capriciousness which are in the very veins of Hamlet.

Never were the scenes with Polonius and with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern played so admirably as by Sarah Bernhardt. Fechter ran her close, but Sarah Bernhardt was the better of the two. In the love scene with Ophelia, the divine Sarah has only had one rival—Henry Irving—but here the French temperament scored off the English, because the brain of the French actress is so quick, her changes so vivid, her alertness so admirable.

The opening of the love scene, when Ophelia is discovered, after the grand soliloquy "To be or not to be," was quite perfect in its earnestness and pathos.

Hamlet has been meditating on death, suicide, the future state, the end of everything. The vision of Ophelia does not suggest to Hamlet passion, but purity. The mere presence of Ophelia makes Hamlet almost a saint. She has touched his bitter nature. He seems to say, not in anger or petulance—

“Get thee to a nunnery, for God’s sake! Why should you be a breeder of sinners? Why should you be contaminated by man, who is so often a beast? Oh, get thee to a nunnery! Save yourself from the contact and contamination of man while you can!”

But once Hamlet has seen the King and Polonius behind the arras, his whole nature changes, his philosophy is soured, his sacred ideas become a mad whirl of emotion. To put it vulgarly, this has

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been, as he thinks, on the part of Ophelia "a put up job." He can scarcely express himself for indignation and disgust. He is too well bred to rave and snort and swear, as most English Hamlets do. His disgust is expressed in a scornful sneer. I have never seen this passage more exquisitely played than by Sarah Bernhardt.

But what exquisite ideas she had! The crossing of herself before she follows the Ghost, the speaking of the speech to the players on the miniature stage, making Hamlet for the moment an actor addressing his audience; the feeling of his father's picture on the walls when the ghost has gone and materialism has come again; the effect of the poison in Hamlet's veins when his hand is scratched in the duel with Laertes; the kissing of his dead

mother's hair,—all these are exquisite points never imagined before.

But the whole thing was imaginative, electrical, and poetical. I do not think I ever sat out the play of *Hamlet* with less fatigue. It all passed like a delightful dream. As a rule the play exhausts one. There was no exhaustion with Sarah Bernhardt—only exhilaration. I think I could have sat it out all over again the same evening—no bad compliment, was it?

The fact is, that with a new brain to interpret this masterpiece, *Hamlet* is ever new. With the French version of the immortal text I was charmed. It conveyed Shakespeare's idea in a nutshell. Nothing was omitted that was absolutely essential ; much was supplied that we often forget in our acting editions.

## 50 SOME NOTABLE "HAMLETS"

In *Hamlet* we do not want only new readings, new ideas, change for the sake of change. We want the actor or actress Hamlet to have genius and the gift of inspiration. These things belong to Sarah Bernhardt. No student of the drama living has admired with greater enthusiasm than I have the superb quality of the technique of this the greatest artist I have ever seen. As Hamlet I see her a greater artist than ever, because her task was heroic in its significance and importance. Sardou is great, but Shakespeare is greater.

Between the Hamlet of Charles Fechter and that of Sarah Bernhardt there is scarcely a shadow of comparison. Both were beautiful to look at, ideal, imaginative, soothing, and satisfying.

Those are the Hamlets that cling to

the memory. So I begin to think, on the whole, that the French temperament is better for the play of *Hamlet* as acted before an audience than the philosophical German, the passionate Italian, the alert American, or the phlegmatic Englishman.

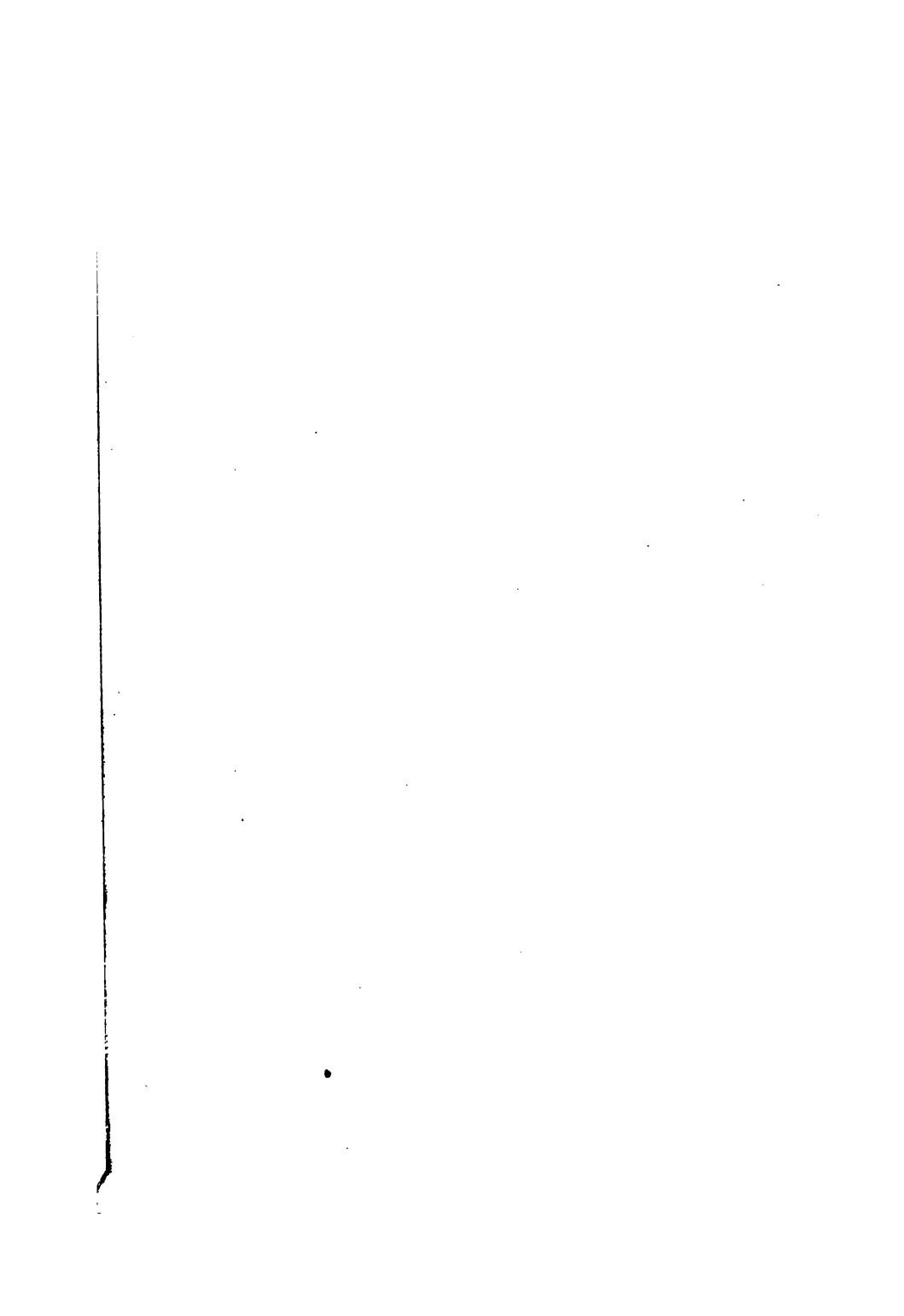
Never heed what people tell you. Take it from me, and, if you have a chance, study, reflect, and analyse Sarah Bernhardt's Hamlet. You may differ from it in insignificant detail, but not in degree. But you are bound to admire it, and in the after years you will not forget it. Merci ! merci ! most gifted artist !



WILL G. MEIN.



HENRY IRVING



HENRY IRVING

1874

## HAMLET

*Lyceum Theatre, October 31, 1874*

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

|                    |   |   |                     |
|--------------------|---|---|---------------------|
| Hamlet             | . | . | Mr. HENRY IRVING.   |
| King               | . | . | THOMAS SWINBOURNE.  |
| Polonius           | . | . | CHIPPENDALE.        |
| Laertes            | . | . | E. LEATHES.         |
| Horatio            | . | . | G. NEVILLE.         |
| Ghost              | . | . | THOMAS MEAD.        |
| Osrice             | . | . | H. B. CONWAY.       |
| Rosencrantz        | . | . | WEBBER.             |
| Guildenstern       | . | . | BEAUMONT.           |
| Marcellus          | . | . | F. CLEMENTS.        |
| Bernardo           | . | . | TAPPING.            |
| Francisco          | . | . | HARWOOD.            |
| First Actor        | . | . | BEVERIDGE.          |
| Second Actor       | . | . | NORMAN.             |
| Priest             | . | . | COLLETT.            |
| Messenger          | . | . | BRANSCOMBE.         |
| First Gravedigger  | . | , | COMPTON.            |
| Second Gravedigger | . | , | CHAPMAN.            |
| Gertrude           | . | . | Miss G. PAUNCEFORT. |
| Player Queen       | . | . | HAMPDEN.            |
| Ophelia            | . | . | ISABEL BATEMAN.     |

## HENRY IRVING

LYCEUM THEATRE, OCTOBER 31, 1874

“THE History of Hamlet,” says an eloquent critic, “is like that of Macbeth, a story of moral poisoning.” The subtle analysis of Goethe, the brilliant peroration of M. Taine, the scholarly criticisms of William Hazlitt, unanimously confirm this verdict. It is Goethe who tells us of the brilliant youth, a lover of art, beloved by his father, enamoured of the purest and most confiding maiden, who has perceived—from the height of the throne to which he was born—nothing but the beauty, happiness, and grandeur, both of Nature and humanity. It is

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Goethe who paints for us the fall of misfortune upon this sensitive soul. M. Taine, with the passionate style and anti-thesis of his nation, whirls us along through all the stages of the moral disease, admitting the feigned madness, but insisting upon the ethical disturbance of Hamlet's mind, which, "as a door whose hinges are twisted, swings and bangs with every wind with a mad haste and a discordant noise."

William Hazlitt is so much in love with the beauty of Shakespeare's picture that he would not have the character acted. He says there is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage. He has seen Mr. Kean and Mr. Kemble; but the English critic refuses to be satisfied. He insists that "there should be as much of the gentleman and scholar infused into

the part, and as little of the actor”! Such criticisms as these are of the highest value as guides to the consideration of the Hamlet of Henry Irving, and to the previous history of the actor who has determined to realise his highest intellectual effort in the exhibition of moral poison.

When we come to think of it, is it not true that the study, the experiences, and the peculiar influence of Mr. Irving’s art tend in the direction of such a Hamlet as was pictured by Goethe, William Hazlitt, and M. Taine? The actor who harrowed our feelings with the agonies of the conscience-stricken Mathias, conquering many prejudices by the power of his intelligence and the minute detail of his art: the poet—for it was with the inspiration of a poet that the sorrows of Charles I. were

58 SOME NOTABLE "HAMLETS"

realised—who expressed the exquisite influence of home life, the crushed heart on the discovery of a false friend, the distressing agony of an everlasting farewell; the artistic dreamer, who, with consummate daring, thought an English audience could be appalled—and it nearly was—by the mental terrors of Eugene Aram, schoolmaster of Lynn—was not this the actor for an ideal Hamlet? was not this the adequate and faithful representative of the effects of moral poison?

It was thus that Mr. Irving's admirers reasoned when, considering his antecedents, they instinctively felt that his Hamlet would be the true one. They did not argue and discuss as Germans do; they did not gesticulate and prate like Frenchmen; but, like sturdy, honest Englishmen, resolute in their convictions,

they crowded to the doors of the Lyceum Theatre at half-past three in the afternoon, prepared to struggle for a performance which could not close before midnight. Here were devotion, impulse, interest. If the drama was to die, the public resolved it should not perish without an heroic struggle for the rescue. If an honest ambition was paramount, it should not lack recognition. It was an audience which will be long remembered. Far more important than the occupiers of the stalls and boxes, was the sight of the unreserved portions of the house—the pit and gallery—containing, as they did, numbers of that class which is the best friend of the drama. The audience that assembled to welcome Mr. Irving was a great protest against the threatened decline of the drama in a country which

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is becoming more and more educated every day. And so, with all on the tip-toe of excitement, the curtain rose.

All present longed to see Hamlet. Bernardo and Marcellus, the Ghost, the platform, the grim preliminaries, the prologue or introduction to the wonderful story, were, as usual, tolerated — nothing more. Away go the platform, the green lights, the softly-stepping spirit, the musical-voiced Horatio. The scene changes to a dazzling interior, broken in its artistic lines, and rich with architectural beauty; the harps sound, the procession is commenced, the jewels, and crowns, and sceptres dazzle, and at the end of the train comes Hamlet. Mark him well, though from this instant the eyes will never be removed from his absorbing figure. They may wander,

but they will soon return. The story may interest, the characters may amuse, the incidents may vary, but from this moment the presence of Hamlet will dwarf all else in the tragedy. How is he dressed, and how does he look? No imitation of the portrait of Sir Thomas Lawrence, no funereal velvet, no elaborate trappings, no Order of the Danish Elephant, no flaxen wig after the model of M. Fechter, no bugles, no stilted conventionality. We see before us a man and a prince, in thick-robed silk and a jacket, or paletot, edged with fur; a tall, imposing figure, so well dressed that nothing distracts the eye from the wonderful face; a costume rich and simple, and relieved alone by a heavy chain of gold; but, above and beyond all, a troubled, weary face displaying the first effects of moral poison.

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The black, disordered hair is carelessly tossed about the forehead, but the fixed and rapt attention of the whole house is directed to the eyes of Hamlet: the eyes which denote the trouble—which tell of the distracted mind. Here are “the windy suspiration of forced breath,” “the fruitful river in the eye,” the “dejected ‘haviour of the visage.” So subtle is the actor’s art, so intense is his application, and so daring his disregard of conventionality, that the first act ends with comparative disappointment. Those who have seen other Hamlets are aghast. Mr. Irving is missing his points, he is neglecting his opportunities. Betterton’s face turned as white as his neck-cloth, when he saw the Ghost. Garrick thrilled the house when he followed the spirit. Some cannot hear Mr. Irving, others

find him indistinct. Many declare roundly he cannot read Shakespeare. There are others who generously observe that Hamlets are not judged by the first act; but over all, disputants or enthusiasts, has already been thrown an indescribable spell. None can explain it; but all are now spellbound. The Hamlet is "thinking aloud," as Hazlitt wished. He is as much of the gentleman and scholar as possible, and "as little of the actor."

We in the audience see the mind of Hamlet. We care little what he does, how he walks, when he draws his sword. We can almost realise the working of his brain. His soliloquies are not spoken down at the footlights to the audience. Hamlet is looking into a glass, into "his mind's eye, Horatio!" His eyes are fixed apparently on nothing,

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though ever eloquent. He gazes on vacancy and communes with his conscience. Those only who have closely watched Hamlet through the first act could adequately express the impression made. But it has affected the whole audience—the Kemble lovers, the Kean admirers, and the Fechter rhapsodists. They do not know how it is, but they are spellbound with the incomparable expression of moral poison.

The second act ends with nearly the same result. There is not an actor living who, on attempting Hamlet, has not made his points in the speech, "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" But Mr. Irving's intention is not to make points, but to give a consistent reading of a Hamlet who "thinks aloud." For one instant he falls "a cursing like a very drab,

a scullion," but only to relapse into a deeper despair, into more profound thought. He is not acting, he is not splitting the ears of the groundlings ; he is an artist concealing his art : he is talking to himself ; he is thinking aloud. Hamlet is suffering from moral poison, and the spell woven about the audience is more mysterious and incomprehensible in the second act than in the first.

In the third act the artist triumphs. No more doubt, no more hesitation, no more discussion. If Hamlet is to be played like a scholar and a gentleman, and not like an actor, this is the Hamlet. The scene with Ophelia turns the scale, and the success is from this instant complete. But we insist that it was not the triumph of an actor alone. It was the realisation of all that the artist has

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been foreshadowing. Mr. Irving made no sudden and striking effect, as did Mr. Kean. "Whatever nice faults might be found on this score," says Hazlitt, "they are amply redeemed by the manner of his coming back after he has gone to the extremity of the stage, from a pang of parting tenderness to press his lips to Ophelia's hand. It had an electrical effect on the house." Mr. Irving did not make his success by any theatrical *coup*, but by the expression of the pent-up agony of a harassed and disappointed man. According to Mr. Irving, the very sight of Ophelia is the keynote of the outburst of his moral disturbance. He loves this woman; "forty thousand brothers" could not express his overwhelming passion, and think what might have happened if he had been allowed to love

her, if his ambition had been realised. The more he looks at Ophelia, the more he curses the irony of fate. He is surrounded, overwhelmed, and crushed by trouble, annoyance, and spies.

They are watching him behind the arras. Ophelia is set on to assist their plot. They are driving him mad, though he is only feigning madness. What a position for a harassed creature to endure ! They are all against him. Hamlet alone in the world is born to "set it right." He is in the height and delirium of moral anguish. The distraction of the unhinged mind, swinging and banging about like a door ; the infinite love and tenderness of the man who longs to be soft and gentle to the woman he adores ; the horror and hatred of being trapped, and watched, and spied upon, were all expressed with

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consummate art. Every voice cheered, and the points Mr. Irving had lost as an actor were amply atoned for by his earnestness as an artist. Fortified with this genuine and heart-stirring applause, he rose to the occasion. He had been understood at last. To have broken down here would have been disheartening ; but he had triumphed.

The speech to the players was Mr. Irving's second success. He did not sit down and lecture. There was no affectation or princely priggishness in the scene at all. He did not give his ideas of art as a prince to an actor, but as an artist to an artist : Mr. Irving spoke to him confidentially, as one man to another. He stood up and took the actor into his confidence, with a half deferential smile, as much as to say, "I do not

attempt to dictate to an artist, but still these are my views on art." But with all this there was a princely air, a kindly courtesy, and an exquisite expression of refinement which astonished the house as much from its daring as its truth. Mr. Irving was gaining ground with marvellous rapidity. His exquisite expression of friendship for Horatio was no less beautiful than his stifled passion for Ophelia. For the one he was the pure and constant friend, for the other the baffled lover.

Determined not to be conquered by his predecessors, he made a signal success in the play scene. He acted it with an impulsive energy beyond all praise. Point after point was made in a whirlwind of excitement. He lured, he tempted, he trapped the King, he drove out his wicked

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uncle conscience-stricken and baffled, and with an hysterical yell of triumph he sank down, "this expectancy and rose of the fair state," in the very throne which ought to have been his, and which his rival had just vacated. It is difficult to describe the excitement occasioned by the acting in this scene. When the King has been "frighted" the stage was cleared instantaneously. No one in the house knew how the people got off. All eyes were fixed on Hamlet and the King; all were forgetting the real play and the mock play, following up every move of the antagonists, and from constant watching they were almost as exhausted as Hamlet was when he sank a conqueror into the neglected throne.

It was all over now. Hamlet had won. He would take the Ghost's word for a

thousand pounds. The clouds cleared from his brow. He was no longer in doubt or despair. He was the victor after this mental struggle. The effects of the moral poison had passed away, and he attacked Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the recorder scene with a sarcasm and a withering scorn which were among the results of a reaction after pent-up agony. But this tremendous act was even now not yet over. There was the closet scene still to come—a scene which still further illustrates the daring defiance of theatrical tradition exhibited by Mr. Irving. If the Hamlet was to be a mental study it should be one to the last. The actor who would conquer prejudices so far was bound to continue, and when the audience looked at the arras for the pictures, or round the necks of the actors and actresses for the

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counterfeit presentment of two brothers, they found nothing.

Mr. Irving intended to conjure up the features of the dead King by a mental struggle, not by any practical or painted assistance. Speaking of David Garrick, Mr. Percy Fitzgerald says: "It was a pity he did not break through the stale old tradition of Hamlet's pulling out the two miniatures instead of the finer notion suggested by Davies of having them on the tapestry—*or the better idea still of seeing them with his mind's eye only.*"

It is this idea which Mr. Irving adopts, and with so striking a success that the audience could scarcely believe that they had for so many years been misled. It is unquestionably the correct view to take, and it can be done with the best possible effect. An act which was such an in-

tellectual strain as this, for both actor and audience, could not fail to be felt. It was exhausting, overpowering. The play ought to have ended here. It was too much for one night.

The nervousness and paralysing excitement occasioned by such an evening made its mark on the actors. It was too great an effort. The fear of being shut out from a glass of beer before midnight frightened the audience, and there were a few minutes of doubt and anxiety. But art conquered, and the audience obeyed. Miss Isabel Bateman came on to play the mad scene of Ophelia, at the very moment when the house was longing for reaction, and was hungry to be free. She conquered at the most important instant of the evening, and she crushed down cruel scoffs by her true impulse. It was a great

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sight to see the young lady—a true artist—sitting down, playing with the flowers, and acting the most difficult scene that was ever written, at a moment when it required the greatest discipline to keep peace. But Miss Bateman conquered, with the rest of the artists, mainly owing to the admirable taste and assistance of an audience loyal to, and appreciative of, art. Not all the heresies of Garrick, nor the sarcasms of Voltaire, would permit Mr. Bateman to remove either the King’s praying scene or the churchyard ceremonies. Poor Mr. Swinbourne went through the first, to a chorus of hammering and shouting from behind; and Mr. Compton, as the First Gravedigger, had not time to remove his ten waistcoats. Still, the audience, true to its purpose, never ventured to interfere. The strain

upon the nervous system of Mr. Irving upon so important an occasion, the growing lateness of the hour, and the wealth of beauty in the play prevented the success which will yet be obtained by Ophelia's mad scene, by Mr. Compton's acting of the Clown, or Gravedigger, and by Hamlet's churchyard passion. But let it not for a moment be supposed that Hamlet ended in an anti-climax. A fencing scene between Hamlet and Laertes, which would have rejoiced the heart of M. Angelo, and which will, owing to the practice and industry of both Mr. Irving and Mr. Leathes, make us forget the tradition of Charles Kean and Alfred Wigan in the *Corsican Brothers*, to say nothing of the murder of the King by Hamlet, which, as regards impulse, determination, and effect, has never been equalled, put

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the final touches to this overwhelming work.

It may be that the intellectual manager will yet have to see how far *Hamlet* can be curtailed to suit this luxurious and selfish age. There are not many audiences which will relinquish their beer for the sake of art. This was a very special occasion. But the supreme moment for the audience had come when the curtain fell. If they had sacrificed their refreshment, waiting there, as many of them had done, since three o'clock in the afternoon, they had done something for art. They had at least deserved the pleasure of cheering the artist who had inspired them. It was no *succès d'estime*. The actor of the evening had, in the teeth of tradition, in the most unselfish manner, and in the most highly artistic fashion, convinced his

hearers. William Hazlitt, the critic, was right. Here was the Hamlet who thinks aloud ; here was the scholar, and so little of the actor. So they threw crowns, and wreaths, and bouquets at the artist, and the good people felt that this artistic assistance had come at a turning-point in the history of English dramatic art. "A pensive air of sadness should sit reluctantly on his brow, but no appearance of fixed and sullen gloom. He is full of weakness and melancholy ; but there is no harshness in his nature. He is the most amiable of misanthropes." So wrote William Hazlitt of Hamlet. It might have been written to-day of Henry Irving. "I have acted Ophelia three times with my father, and each time, in that beautiful scene where his madness and his love gush forth together, like

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a torrent swollen with storms, that bears a thousand blossoms on its troubled waters, I have experienced such deep emotion as hardly to be able to speak. The letter and jewel cases I was tendering him were wet with tears." So wrote Fanny Kemble of her father, Charles Kemble. The words might have been spoken of Henry Irving, whose scene with Ophelia will never be forgotten. This is not a critical essay on the distinguished merit of a most valuable performance, but a necessarily brief comment on the impressions registered by a remarkable evening at the play. Time will not allow one to linger as one might on the distinguished and loyal assistance of such artists and favourite actors as Mr. Thomas Mead, Mr. Chippendale, Mr. Swinbourne, and Miss Pauncefort.

The effect of Mr. Mead's splendid elocution, and of Miss Pauncefort's facial agony, cannot be overrated. It would be highly pleasant also to congratulate such genuine young enthusiasts of another and more modern school, as Mr. George Neville, Mr. Leathes, Mr. Beveridge, and Miss Isabel Bateman. But our efforts, without prejudice, have been devoted to the actor who will be valued by his fellows, and to a performance which will make its mark in the dramatic history of our times. The position of Mr. Irving, occasionally wavering and pleasantly hesitating in the balance, has now been firmly established. The Hamlet of Henry Irving is a noble contribution to dramatic art.



WILL G. MEIN



WILSON BARRETT.



**WILSON BARRETT**

**1884**

## HAMLET

*Princess's Theatre, October 16, 1884*

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

|                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Hamlet . . . .             | Mr. WILSON BARRETT.     |
| Ophelia . . . .            | Miss EASTLAKE.          |
| Claudius . . . .           | Mr. E. S. WILLARD.      |
| Ghost . . . .              | „ JOHN DEWHURST.        |
| Polonius . . . .           | „ CLIFFORD COOPER.      |
| Horatio . . . .            | „ J. R. CRAUFORD.       |
| Laertes . . . .            | „ FRANK COOPER.         |
| First Actor . . . .        | „ WALTER SPEAKMAN.      |
| Second Actor . . . .       | WILLIAMSON.             |
| Rosencrantz . . . .        | „ G. R. FOSS.           |
| Guildenstern . . . .       | CHARLES FULTON.         |
| Osric . . . .              | „ NEVILLE DOONE.        |
| Marcellus . . . .          | „ H. EVANS.             |
| Bernardo . . . .           | „ W. A. ELLIOTT.        |
| Francisco . . . .          | „ H. DE SOLLA.          |
| First Gravedigger . . . .  | „ GEORGE BARRETT.       |
| Second Gravedigger . . . . | „ H. BERNAGE.           |
| Priest . . . .             | M. CLEARY.              |
| Messenger . . . .          | „ H. BESLEY.            |
| Sailor . . . .             | „ LENNOX.               |
| Gertrude . . . .           | Miss MARGARET LEIGHTON. |
| Player Queen . . . .       | „ MARY DICKENS.         |

## WILSON BARRETT

PRINCESS'S THEATRE, OCTOBER 16, 1884

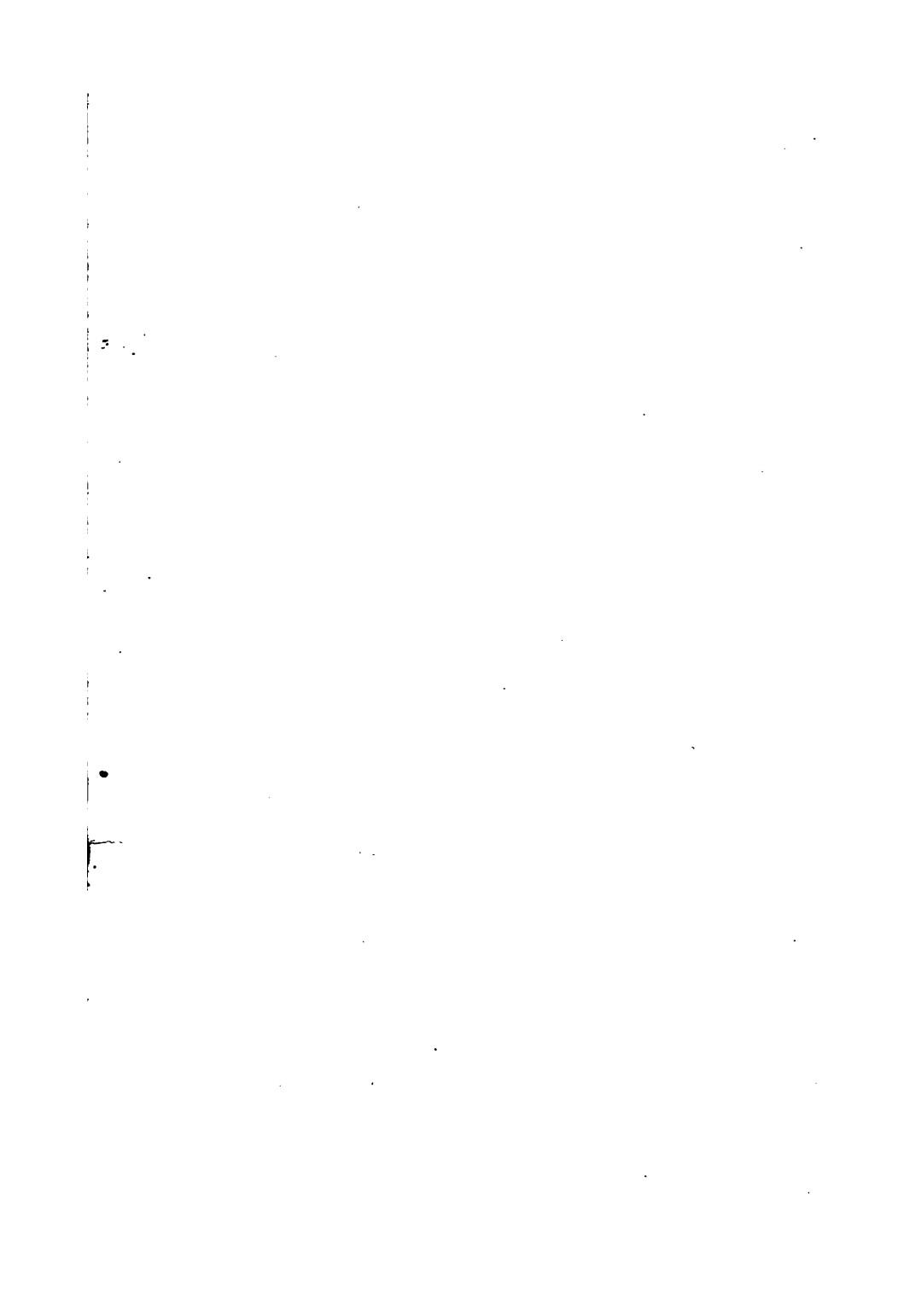
HAD not Mr. Wilson Barrett succeeded beyond even his most distant ambition, he would never have spoken the speech he delivered in response to the applause that followed the fall of the curtain in the play of *Hamlet*. Had the actor not detected a truth and sincerity in the encouragement beyond mere conventional compliment, he would never, from his own stage, have allowed the lips so faithfully to follow the dictates of a full heart. "Twenty-five years ago," said Mr. Wilson Barrett, "a poor and almost friendless lad stood out-

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side the walls of the theatre that once stood here, and determined to devote his last sixpence to the enjoyment in the gallery of one of the celebrated revivals of Charles Kean. Coming out of the theatre, he swore to himself that he would not only become manager of that theatre, but that in the distant future he would play Hamlet on that very spot. Ambition is in this instance satisfied, for the little boy was myself, and I have played Hamlet before you this evening!" The effect of this simple story was immediate and direct on an audience for the moment taken off their guard by the *naïveté* of the announcement, and amidst renewed cheers Mr. Barrett retired behind the curtain to receive even a more enthusiastic welcome from the company who served him so loyally and by whom he was held in such

affectionate regard. It was, of course, a very memorable evening, and would have been an encouraging moment in the career of any actor. In addition to the many personal friends who wished him well in a trying ordeal, literature was represented by such true lovers of the drama as Lord Lytton, Professor Ruskin, and Mr. Matthew Arnold, and from first to last the play and the players received the utmost courtesy and attention.

The stage of the theatre, dedicated to some unnamed and unidentified princess, appears to play a very important part in the history of Hamlets. Here, more than a quarter of a century ago, Charles Kean, many a time and oft, enacted this one of his most favourite Shakespearian characters, the memory of which has not been dispelled by days of so-called natural



WILSON BARRETT

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conflicting character. "Hamlet is a name ; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of a poet's brain. What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is we who are Hamlet." It is not for the critic who is conscious of the universality of art and its manysidedness, to pin his faith absolutely and entirely to the Hamlet of Macready, or Phelps, or Fechter, or Booth, or Irving, or Barrett, but it is his obvious duty to follow with as much diligence as he may the various by-paths and lanes by which they hope to arrive at a prospect satisfactory to themselves and exhilarating to their companions. Whenever a diligent student of Shakespeare appears amongst us and he fixes on Hamlet as his essay, we are bound to

consider, first, his acting version of the text; secondly, the decorative skill expended on the production ; and, lastly, the effect and value of his interpretation.

Mr. Wilson Barrett's rearrangement of the text is in many respects novel, in most judicious, and in all unselfish. By unselfish we mean he has not sacrificed every consideration of the play to the fact that he himself is playing the leading character, and desires to show it off to the best advantage ; on the contrary, he discards much theatrical trick personal to himself as Hamlet, and adds prominence thereby to the character of the King, who never before has been allowed to show how dramatically effective he can become when in capable and clever hands. For instance, the speech "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" has hitherto

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been an acting climax for Hamlet; the curtain has always fallen at the end of this fine and effective soliloquy, and the Hamlets who have gone before have not been indifferent to the applause that has resulted from it. But Mr. Barrett goes on straight with the drama at this point, proceeds with the Ophelia scene, and so secures a valuable break of time in order to start the play and all that is connected with it in the garden grounds of the Palace. All this is new, interesting, unstrained, and effective. Hamlet makes his speech to the Players on his road to the selected spot in the moonlit grove where, with the silver path upon the distant sea, under the dark shadows of the castle towers and amidst the gloomy fir trees, they have pitched an open platform on which the Players perform the

fatal "Mousetrap." On this play scene considerable thought and ingenuity have been expended. The gay dresses of the courtiers, the amorous attitudes of the King and Queen whispering together amidst the excitement of representation and the mystery of the scene, the variety of light obtained by flaring torches, and the persistent beauty of the clear, still moon, all combine to make a change, but not unwelcome contrast, to the stereotyped regularity of the celebrated picture by Macclise. As a matter of stage arrangement it may be doubted if it be wise to place Hamlet and Ophelia, the principal points of the picture, so far up the stage, and whether effect is not sacrificed by the modest reticence of Hamlet, who retires into the background instead of sprawling on the floor. But the scene is, at least,

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novel and interesting. Here occurs one of Mr. Wilson Barrett's great effects. What shall Hamlet do when the King has been "frighted with false fire"? What shall become of this mischievous personage when the court and its retinue have called for "lights" and vanished into space? Shall Hamlet throw himself shrieking into the empty throne, or fall weeping upon the shoulders of the faithful Horatio? Shall he show ambition or affection, which? Shall his nervous excitement end in a yell of triumph over the defeated King, or in the prostration that results from an overstrained nervous susceptibility? Mr. Barrett thinks neither. The whole bent of the mind of Hamlet has been turned upon acting. He has been talking to and instructing the Players; he has worked up the new play,

it has succeeded beyond his expectations. So what does he do? After the hubbub and turbulence of the exposure he leaps upon the stage, he takes it, he shows that he can rant as well as the best of them. His mind is full of wild and whirling words, he pieces together scraps of disjointed authors and eccentric impromptus, and so upon the stage that is deserted, pitched on the very spot in the garden where his dear father was murdered—a very delicate idea—the excited and storm-tossed Hamlet lets himself go, and lets out his pent-up excitement before the astonished Horatio. In the succeeding scenes the unselfishness of the new arrangement is again apparent. When Hamlet has repaired to his mother's chamber and shown her life to her as in a mirror, the act does not conclude

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with the last good-night between mother and son. The play goes on as it was evidently intended to do. The King before retiring to rest consults Gertrude on the anxious condition of affairs; the details of the disposal of the body of Polonius are fully explained, and the departure of Hamlet for England is definitely fixed.

This done, all is consistent and natural in point of time for the return of Laertes in the next act and all the pathetic circumstances of the madness and death of Ophelia. These structural alterations are alike judicious and admirable. They are not done for the higher glorification of the actor who plays Hamlet, and who, *ipso facto*, is bound to be prominent according to stage theory, but they are done for the better and higher under-

standing and interest of the play. They have a good result in a fine study and conception of the character of the King. All who will see Mr. Willard suggesting to Laertes the dastardly trick that is to slaughter Hamlet in the fencing bout will not regret a change which restores to the acting version so dramatic and admirable a picture.

These changes are mostly suggested by a close study of the First Folio, which has also been the parent of certain alterations in the accepted text. The very first line uttered by Hamlet causes a shudder. When, amidst all the panoply and pomp of the wedding ceremonial, Hamlet sits apart, the one dark and sombre figure amidst the brilliancy of colour, when the dancers and jesters and pages have settled down to attention, and

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the audience waits for the first words to fall from Hamlet, he answers the King so as to make the spectators look at one another with surprise. The King turns to Hamlet with the customary "But now, my cousin Hamlet and my sonne," to which Hamlet replies, "A little more than kin and lesse than kinde," with the "i" in "kind" as short as may be, and implying a contrast between affinity and nature—the former for child, the natural antithesis to "son," as suggested by the King. Further on Mr. Barrett introduces the First Folio reading of the line, "The ayre bites shrewdly ; is it very cold," that equally astonishes the accustomed ear of the audience ; and in the play scene the new Hamlet emphasises his disagreement with one of Mr. Irving's best-known points. All must remember the fan of

peacocks' feathers snatched from Ophelia's hands, played with and torn to bits with nervous excitability during the scene, and subsequently cast indignantly aside to illustrate the jingle :—

“For thou dost know, O Damon, dear,  
This realm dismantled was  
Of Jove himself ; and now reigns here  
A very, very Paiocke !”

—that is to say, a strutting, showy, and contemptible creature. Mr. Barrett goes lower down in the world of animals, and substitutes “paddock,” or toad, the animal to which the King is subsequently compared in the scene with the Queen.

“For who, that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,  
Would from a paddock, from a bat, or gib,  
Such dear concernings hide ?”

We now come to the decorative skill expended on the production of the play,

and on this point there may be considerable difference of opinion. It is an age of realism, and realistic authorities have had full scope for the exercise of their ingenuity. Once start the scenic artist or the stage archæologist on the subject of Denmark, and away he goes. The scene is in Denmark, and the play deals with Denmark, and that is quite enough. Whatever is ugly, whatever is grotesque, unusual, semi-barbaric, must be introduced at the expense of the innate poetry of the play. If the Danes of that period wore hideous swords, ungainly fighting implements ; if they covered their heads with eccentric gear strange and uncouth to the modern eye ; if they lived out-of-doors, or in draughty rooms half furnished with coarse rude benches and stiff hangings ; if they clothed themselves with

startling and inharmonious colours—all these realisms must be introduced to justify accuracy of treatment and to confound the spectator. Did Shakespeare act on this principle or on one that is its exact opposite? The church in *Hamlet*, to the mind of the reader of *Hamlet*, is as much outside Denmark as can possibly be conceived; the gravediggers are pure Warwickshire labourers. The “crowners quest law” is pure English law in the days of Queen Elizabeth. “Go, get thee to Yaugham; fetch me a stoup of liquor” only means go to the nearest alehouse in the English village. No journeys to Denmark, no faithful copies of Danish churches or graveyards, no ugly reproduction of what is foreign to the mind and understanding, will ever take the imagination away from the scene that

Shakespeare loved and so faithfully painted.

When we think of the scene of Ophelia's melancholy suicide our mind does not go to Elsinore or its vicinity, but to some old English pond sequestered in a nook behind an English homestead, where would be found the willow growing aslant the brook, the "crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples," "the envious sliver," and all the pure English detail of Shakespeare's enchanting picture. Why, then, distress the play with a forced realism that is unnatural to it? If we, watching the drama, desire to love Horatio and to sympathise with Laertes, why make the one comical with a head-dress like an inverted jelly-bag, or the other startling with the unsightly designs on his most unbecoming costumes?

No harm would have been done if the churchyard could have erred in an English direction, had been quieter, simpler, or more pastoral, or if both Horatio and Laertes could have been made more picturesque; but much harm is done if this slavish adherence to accurate realism robs the churchyard scene of its peace, beauty, and significance, retards our sympathy from the loving Horatio, and raises an unwelcome laugh at the expense of Laertes. It is better to be inaccurate and inconsistent with Shakespeare, to believe against our conviction that the burial of Ophelia is at home in our native village, amidst the wild flowers that the poet loves, and amidst scenes of rural simplicity, than to take us away to fir trees and Scandinavian gloom, to temples, and mausoleums, and scattered

crosses, which may be true to Denmark of to-day or to Denmark of Shakespeare's time, but which are, when all is said and done, distracting to the attention and extremely ugly into the bargain.

We now come to the acting, which is, after all, the most difficult matter to discuss. Mr. Wilson Barrett's Hamlet was one of the surprises, we had almost said one of the audacities, of modern art. It was rapid, emotional, hysterical, passionate, and restless. In the actor's effort to avoid being conventional he often rushed into the opposite extreme and forgot to be reflective. He started off at whirlwind speed, and almost took the breath of the audience away with surprise that he had stamina enough to endure the fatigue and exhaustion of such an enterprise. Never did actor so heartily

despise the funereal gloom, the pauses and the tricks of the old school. He had no patience with the funereal plumes of John Kemble style, and no doubt laughs the old picture by Sir Thomas Lawrence to scorn. Even those who were not educated according to the teaching of old-fashioned doctrine, who rebelled a little at Charles Kean and Phelps, and who derived inspiration from the heretical Fechter, sat astonished at the daring unconventionality of the new Hamlet.

They wait for points, or the semblance of points, but these were blown to the winds. Mr. Barrett would have none of them. He went out of his way to avoid them, and occasionally sacrificed effect thereby. Old playgoers can count them off on their fingers. In the "rogue and peasant" soliloquy, "Why I should

take it!" is a familiar point with most Hamlets; but this one gave it scant emphasis. In the second scene scarce a Hamlet who ever lived avoided the temptation of cracking the instrument across his knees and flinging it into the air to emphasise his sarcasm. Mr. Barrett, with perhaps truer art, allowed the voice to add gall to his satire, and returned the pipe to Horatio with the courtesy of a well-bred gentleman. Even when we come to the scene in the Queen's closet immediately after the slaughter of Polonius, the famous, and, it must be granted, very natural point, "Is it the King?" was almost wilfully slurred over or scornfully ignored. Mr. Barrett determined that his Hamlet should not be one of theatrical tradition—it should be some contribution to the school of natural

acting ; the text be spoken fluently and without affectation ; and he evidently made up his mind to stand or fall by his passionate style, his wild and declamatory manner, and his own impulsive temperament. Now, all this is very well, but the actor must have seen at the outset that the character of Hamlet does not lend itself exactly to the expression of natural acting that Mr. Barrett sought to convey. There is another Hamlet feasible, with the best intention of natural style, who is more than an hysterical youth and an impassioned orator. There is Hamlet the lover, Hamlet the thinker, Hamlet the philosopher, Hamlet the man of grace and courtliness and beauty, Hamlet the glass of fashion, Hamlet the man of breeding and culture. All these Hamlets might have been present

to Mr. Barrett's mind, but he had no time to attend to them. Hamlet has a voice, and it is the voice that must supply what before now has been behind the voice, that one and important thing—so? So admirably and vehemently was the first act played; so quick, bright, and nervous was the actor, so thoroughly had he braced up the nerves of his audience and communicated to them his own electricity, that even old playgoers must have trembled behind their own convictions. On and on went the play, and with the same result.

The "rogue and peasant" speech was a noble example of untricky declamation; but after the scene with Ophelia, which had plenty of passion but lacked tenderness, it was seen that the pace was far too good to last. By degrees it not

only exhausted the actor, but it fatigued his audience as well. The relief of a pause would have been appreciated. We wanted to see more into the mind of Hamlet and to hear less of his beseeching voice. But even in the play scene there was a splendid struggle left in the actor, who administered his own lash. The leaping on the stage, the ranting of the incoherent stanzas, the wild gesticulations, and the fall of the exhausted, spent, and hysterical Prince into the arms of Horatio, were amongst the last efforts of which such an impulsive Hamlet could possibly be capable. Human strength could stand no more. In the closet scene there were signs of exhaustion, in the churchyard scene there was a distinct failure of strength, the interview with Osric was almost inaudible, and the elegance of the

fencing, with a highly studied and picturesque death, alone relieved the monotony of the last act. A contrary result could scarcely have been anticipated. Such a view of the character is of inestimable advantage in many scenes ; it lightens and brightens many a passage ; but whether it does not bring in its train corresponding disadvantages, is a matter which will be fully discussed when the new Hamlet is exposed to careful analysis and detailed criticism.

We have already hinted at several of the innovations of the acting text ; but of course it will be asked what Mr. Wilson Barrett did with the pictures of the two husbands, in order to avoid convention and strike out a new path for himself. Did the pictures hang on the walls, were they embroidered in the tapestry, were

they contained in golden lockets, or were they hovering about in the air, and forced into reality by pure imagination? Mr. Barrett cleverly split the difference. The portrait of Hamlet's father was ever about the Prince's neck. He was for ever fondling it. It was this picture that supported him in many of his struggles; it was this picture that he held to his uncle when he desired to insult him; it was this loved picture that the faithful Horatio held to the dying lips of his friend instead of a cross—the emblem of salvation. With this miniature about his neck Hamlet entered his mother's chamber, the mother who is yet a lovely woman, and who is tiring herself before the approach of her beloved lord. Fiercely upbraiding her for her partiality for that same hated uncle, the hand of Hamlet acci-

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dentially falls on a portrait of his mother's husband, which is resting on her *prie-dieu*. This gave him the cue he required. Seizing up the cabinet picture which was at hand, he compared it with the locket, and ended by stamping it under his feet in a tempest of rage. This "business," as it is called, was found to be very effective, and whether appreciated or not, it is at least another rendering of a difficult and often-disputed passage. On his side Mr. Wilson Barrett can range, at any rate, the countless persons who have never seen Hamlet acted at all, for with the majority the first Hamlet is always the best. He is a friend whose allegiance is steadily maintained. We have briefly pointed out the eccentricity and the excellency of Mr. Barrett's Hamlet. To call it melodramatic would be to convey a false impression of

what was always vigorous and often picturesque. To sum up, it pleased the ear more than it satisfied the heart; it appealed to the eye more than to the intellect. It fatigued the spectator from its monotony of vigour; but, with all its drawbacks, it was vastly in advance of the mouthing and attitudinising Hamlets of other days, who attempted to show that they possessed brains by affecting pedantry. It was a new Hamlet—of that there is no question; that it was the true Hamlet, who shall be bold enough to say? That it was a popular rendering of the part there cannot be a shadow of a doubt, for the applause was genuine and the congratulations evidently sincere.

A striking change was made in the outward appearance of King and Queen. They were no longer “old fogies,” but a

man and woman in the passionate heyday of middle life, and this view was well carried out by Mr. E. S. Willard, who gave a remarkably fine performance of the King, and by Miss Margaret Leighton, who made a handsome and most interesting Queen. All the added scenes were of the greatest service to Mr. Willard, who showed that the King can be much more than a lay figure and inanimate dummy. He was a man of flesh and blood, obviously devoted to his helpmate, and concealing all through his nervous apprehension of Hamlet. The King's great soliloquy at prayer was admirably spoken, and the scene where Laertes is tempted to juggle with the foils produced some acting of very remarkable interest. Seldom have the words of King and Queen been so well and intelligently

delivered as they were by Mr. Willard and Miss Leighton. As Ophelia, Miss Eastlake was a surprising success. It was, indeed, the best thing she had done for many years, attacking the mad scene boldly as she did, and illustrating it with many a pretty and tender touch. The opening scenes of the play were not quite so satisfactory as the mad scene, but this produced a marked impression on the audience, and gave to the actress a very cheering encouragement. All supernatural idea was divorced from the Ghost of Mr. Dewhurst, who produced from the massive form a very unusual mincing manner and the most delicate of affected voices. All the poetry of Horatio evaporated in the hands of Mr. J. R. Crauford, but, to tell the truth, poetry was not the strong point of the revival in acting, scenery, or dress.

The play, for the most part, was blunt and barbaric to a fault. But, on the other hand, the Polonius of Mr. Clifford Cooper, the Laertes of Mr. Frank Cooper, and the Player Queen of Miss Mary Dickens, were all serviceable and clever enough. Next, however, in importance to the Hamlet of Mr. Barrett and the King of Mr. Willard we should rank the First Player of Mr. Speakman and the First Gravedigger of Mr. George Barrett—the first an example of sound and manly elocution, and the last a true bit of humorous acting divested of all traditional nonsense and time-worn gag. It was not to be expected that such a new and original Hamlet as Mr. Wilson Barrett would kick down a chair at the entrance of the Ghost in the closet scene, though the business is hoary with antiquity ; and

the same considerate abnegation affected Mr. George Barrett, who did not pull off a dozen waistcoats, because he had no visible waistcoats to pull off. The scene in which the grave was dug was eminently secular, but the acting of the Gravedigger was of the good old English pattern, and a relief to the sombre character of the play.





HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE.



**HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE**

**1892**

## HAMLET

*Haymarket Theatre, January 21, 1892*

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

|                          |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Hamlet . . .             | Mr. H. BEERBOHM TREE. |
| Ophelia . . .            | Mrs. TREE.            |
| Claudius . . .           | Mr. F. H. MACKLIN.    |
| Ghost . . .              | JAMES FERNANDEZ.      |
| Polonius . . .           | H. KEMBLE.            |
| Horatio . . .            | ARTHUR DACRE.         |
| Laertes . . .            | FRED TERRY.           |
| First Actor . . .        | CHARLES HUDSON.       |
| Second Actor . . .       | WARDEN.               |
| Rosencrantz . . .        | J. M. HALLARD.        |
| Guildenstern . . .       | CARAVOGLIA.           |
| Osric . . .              | IVAN WATSON.          |
| Marcellus . . .          | ROBB HARWOOD.         |
| Bernardo . . .           | CRAWLEY.              |
| Francisco . . .          | BENN.                 |
| First Gravedigger . . .  | GEORGE BARRETT.       |
| Second Gravedigger . . . | EDWARD ROSE.          |
| Priest . . .             | CHARLES ALLEN.        |
| Gertrude . . .           | Miss ROSE LECLERCQ.   |
| Player Queen . . .       | CLAIRE IVANOVA.       |

## HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE

HAYMARKET THEATRE, JANUARY 21, 1892

MIDNIGHT was striking when the curtain finally fell on the last act of *Hamlet*, and Mr. Beerbohm Tree received a generous outburst of approval from the loyal friends who had waited to see the end of this stupendous endeavour. Here was an instance of pluck and determination which the public well loves, and Mr. Tree and his gifted wife did not want for cordial sympathy. A new Hamlet! The instant the announcement is made there is a rush to see, to criticise, to greet, or superciliously to depose the rash intruder. Every edu-

cated man and woman wants to behold Hamlet on the stage, and the curious part of it is that the first Hamlet we scan with our eager eyes is invariably the best in our youthful imagination. We all know it; it is an accepted axiom. The Hamlet of Macready and Phelps was by no manner of means their best or most subtle Shakespearian personation. But old playgoers swear by both. They had never understood Hamlet until they saw the scowling old gentleman in the black scratch-wig, divested of youth, poetic fervour, and imagination. Even Barry Sullivan had his admirers as the Prince of Denmark, with his suburban readings and alarming solecisms. The boys of the "sixties" still swear by Fechter's Hamlet, and readily forgive the accent, the inevitable affectation, the curious

conceits, for the sake of the romantic ideality, the picturesque appearance, the fair Norse hair, and the "fruitful river in the eye," as the imaginative Frenchman made love to Ophelia, or sat beneath the cross communing on the skull of the jester Yorick. And so with the advance of time came more and still more Hamlets. There were Hamlets of masculine woman and Hamlets of effeminate men. There was the never-to-be-forgotten scholars' Hamlet of Henry Irving, an intellectual surprise never yet effaced from the memory. There was the distinctly "middle-class" Hamlet of Wilson Barrett, clever, passionate, and "boyish," which was its pride and misfortune. There was the musical Hamlet of Faure, and the wild, impulsive Hamlet of Mounet Sully, showy, operatic, and theatrical to a fault.

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And last night there stepped upon the stage the newest, the youngest, the most industrious of all the recent Hamlets. Every actor of imagination, every stage student, anyone of an ideal and artistic temperament, looks upon Hamlet as his translation from the dull world of commonplace to the paradise of poetry.

Mr. Beerbohm Tree has proved himself to be an actor with many of these great gifts. Of course, he must play Hamlet. If you tell him that the most intellectual Hamlet must have physique, he will tell you that he (the student) has brains. There is no question about that. The experienced actor knows full well that no one, however young, can make a serious mistake with Hamlet. If he has not the voice-power for the passion, he has the requisite tact for the

comedy ; if he fails with the heartrending despair in the presence of his father's spirit, he will delight everyone with his caustic, satirical, and telling scenes with Polonius ; if he cannot wholly bear up against the exhausting calls upon his best physical efforts, the memory will linger lovingly on the scenes of infinite tenderness with Ophelia. This new Hamlet, if unequal, was always interesting ; if at odd times he was formidably nervous and accidentally imperfect, there came a moment when he redeemed every fault, and the kindly reflection came, " Well, it is a tremendous task, and all may be well on another night ! " How could such an actor as Mr. Beerbohm Tree by any possibility divest Hamlet of his interesting personality ? No one ever yet did it, though the actor were in his

dotage or in reality as "fat and scant of breath" as Burbage.

There was a double interest last night. One was of expectancy; the other was of not unnatural sentiment. By the most curious coincidence in the world the new Hamlet, the young Prince, the "expectancy and rose of the fair state," came upon the stage at the very hour of great and national sorrow.\* It could not be helped. It was, as we have said, a coincidence; but dull indeed would have been an audience that did not instinctively and instantly apply the words of Shakespeare's text to the feeling that was then uppermost in the minds of men and women.

Who could hear wholly unmoved such

\* The death of the Duke of Clarence is here referred to.

lines as these : “O, Rose of May ! Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia ”? or turn to one another in astonishment at such a couplet as—

“I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife ;  
I thought thy bride bed to have deck’d, sweet maid ”?

or have thought, and thought deeply, over the truth implied in that glorious introspective remark of Hamlet to Horatio : “If it be now, ’tis not to come ; if it be not to come, it will be now ; if it be not now, yet it will come : the readiness is all ”? Or what eyes could remain wholly undimmed when, amidst choirs of angels and sweet music, gentle Horatio commended his dear friend’s soul with the words that sounded like a “ bidding prayer ?”—

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"Now cracks a noble heart. Good-night, sweet  
Prince;  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"

There was a natural excitement to obtain the first impression of the new Hamlet. What would he be like? Would he wear dark hair or light? Would he be close-cropped, like the actors of a bygone day, or would he wear the long, fair, Danish hair of the picturesque and innovating Fechter? He was neither one nor the other. Mr. Beerbohm Tree wore reddish hair, with a slight, unobtrusive beard, and every opportunity was given for the play of the expressive eyes and mobile features. But the general impression conveyed was an excellent one. The actor, as he came sadly into the festive court, was "every inch a prince." There was an air of

refinement and gentleness about him. He was a figure very marked in this dazzling assembly. The eye rested on him, and he at once interested the spectator.

It is a tremendous test, this play and character of Hamlet. We are all on the alert. What will he do here? how will he improve this? how will he alter that? It is well-nigh impossible to keep in bounds the retentive memory. Once a thing has been well done, it is difficult to refrain from comparison. Hence the objections that are hurled at the head of the experienced playgoer who is not always so obstinate as to swear by the past, but earnestly desires that fixed impressions may be improved upon. Let us say at once, and very candidly, that in the earlier scenes of the play—the

scenes on the castellated ramparts, the scenes that are so assisted by music and supernaturalism and mystery—the actor did not do himself great justice. A nervousness inevitable on so trying an occasion almost mastered him, and nervousness with Mr. Beerbohm Tree takes a very curious form. It makes his delivery monotonous, it causes him to be at sea with his words, and it somehow checks that welcome variety and constant change which is the distinguishing feature of Mr. Tree's comedy acting. Unless Hamlet can be played with intermittent flashes of variety, the whole thing falls flat. Every scene, every speech gives an opportunity for that welcome gift in an actor—contrast. That nervousness was the whole and sole cause of this was very soon proved. When the time came for

the well-known test speech, "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!"—the speech which has proved too much for the best Hamlets—then suddenly the actor shook off his evident anxiety and came out victorious, to the surprise of many who were in despair. I have seldom heard this soliloquy so well delivered, with so much meaning and effect. All the monotony of soliloquising was obviated in a masterly fashion. The crouching at the foot of the throne, terror-stricken with mental anxiety, the glare of the firelight falling on the interesting face, the avoidance of all commonplace and accepted points, came as a revelation. Now, thought the audience, we are to have a Hamlet of exceptional interest.

The scenes with Ophelia were infinitely

tender and unquestionably beautiful, well considered always, but lacking the charm of inspiration ; and the play scene would in all respects have been admirably effective had not the actor, again through nervousness, hurried the action and brought about the climax before it was due. The departure of the King is the signal for the general dispersal of the court, but long before the King could leave his throne Hamlet was at him and almost pinning him down, anticipating the effect the actor most desired to secure.

This is a difficulty most easily obviated, and it is scarcely worth dwelling upon at present. After the play scene the actor's strength seemed to flag again, and the old monotony returned in the scene with the mother, which is the special delight of most Hamlets, and was, as we all

remember, the special success in the case of Henry Irving.

From this point the play certainly flagged. Interest seemed to ooze away, and the educated ear was tortured with readings accidentally imperfect and accents curiously misplaced. But, as good luck would have it, an Ophelia was found in Mrs. Beerbohm Tree of exceptional interest and very remarkable intelligence. We do not remember, in a long experience, to have heard the wild unaccompanied snatches of song and ballad wailed in such faultless tone and with such pathetic expression. There was nothing stagey or theatrical about this performance. It was a new and a true Ophelia. The scream of the distraught woman was so sudden and rang so true that there was no doubt of its power in effect. The in-

evitable test known as "the shiver down the back" was incontestably there. Mrs. Beerbohm Tree has given us a most thoughtful, interesting, and pathetic picture of the love-lorn girl. In her early scenes she was gentle and lovable, poetic and picturesque; and the mad scene was adorned with beautiful imagery by one of a rich artistic temperament. It may be interesting to jot down roughly and with the haste that is inevitable, some of the special features of the last version of *Hamlet* by Beerbohm Tree. We may have missed many, several more may return to us, but these are already specially marked on the memory.

In the first place the music. Without doubt an attempt has been made to mark very strongly the supernatural element of the play by the aid of Mr.

Henschel's most interesting music. Every earnest actor desires to do away with the material ghost. Both the ghost of Hamlet's father and the ghost of "blood-boltered" Banquo are a dreadful "crux" to the poetical manager. Limelights, transparencies, gauzes, turrets, pictures, have all been tried to divert the active imagination of the corporeal ghost. We cannot get rid of his fleshly intrusion. If ghosts will talk and walk in the "habit as they lived," the natural must gain the ascendancy over the supernatural. Mr. Beerbohm Tree makes an attempt to dematerialise the spirit by slow music and the "held chord."

Very early in the play Mr. Tree emphasises his special idea that Hamlet separates himself from the earthly, consoling, and sympathetic love of Ophelia

under an acute and appalling sense of duty to the dead. He longs to love Ophelia, but fate has willed it otherwise. Between her and him arises his father's spirit and his oath. Love and loving-kindness have been merged in a supreme sense of duty. At once this note is struck early in the first act. It is the first time since their marriage that the King and Queen have received the court. The royal procession is ushered on with special pomp to the playing of triumphal music; children strew flowers before the handsome Queen and the jolly-looking, sensual King. And, of course, Ophelia enters as an attendant on the Queen. But mark the exit. Ophelia is the last to retire. She, with womanly instinct, observes Hamlet's distress, and, with gentle tenderness, rests

her hand upon his arm. He greedily seizes her hand, kisses it passionately, but, after a minute's thought, puts it away, and sadly turns from the woman he idolises. His soul is possessed with a larger passion. Love such as that is out of all consideration now. When the scene is closing there are shouts of merriment and cries of "Long live the King!" But Hamlet stands and holds his ears at the hated sound, as did Irving's Mephisto outside the cathedral during the wail of the "Dies Irae" that shook the soul of Margaret to its very foundation.

Another idea. In the ghost scene Hamlet's hesitancy to do a violent deed seems to be checked for the first time. At the words, "Villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!" Hamlet half draws his

sword, as though to put his vengeance into immediate execution ; but he checks the impulse, exclaiming nervously, " My tables, my tables ! " The immateriality of the spirit is expressed by the Prince impulsively rushing to embrace his father, but beating himself against the bare wall in impotent despair. The slight change at the beginning of the second act was excusable. Mechanical difficulties are prevented by playing the scene between Polonius and Ophelia at the Palace instead of at the old Chamberlain's house. They are both, of course, in constant attendance at the court. We observe that at the end of the scene with the Players Hamlet is impatient to be alone with his thoughts. Thus, with a growing sense of irritation at espionage, he dismisses Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern; and, after the satisfied sigh, "Now I am alone," he throws himself on the couch to revel in the self-torment contained in that marvellous soliloquy, "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" In the course of this speech he rises and paces nervously about, and makes his climax, not as Fechter did so admirably with "Why, I should take it," but with the words "Oh, vengeance!" He has now spent his force, and sinks exhausted on the steps of the throne, and again puzzles his distracted brains what to do. The last words, "The play's the thing," are not shouted, but spoken in a hoarse whisper. The scene now has gradually darkened, and the only light comes from the huge wood fire. Hamlet takes out his tables, and, crouching down, rapidly

jots down the words by the lurid light of the embers. Mr. Irving, it will be remembered, scribbled hastily at the tables, leaning against a pillar, as the curtain descended.

There were some important novelties in the third act. When Mr. Telbin's beautiful scene was disclosed we observed on one side of the stage a turret room, which was evidently used as a private oratory. A Madonna in a shrine, with a blue lamp burning in front of it, hung close to the *prie-dieu* containing a book of prayers. This book was taken by Polonius and given to Ophelia: "Read on this book." The daughter, half protesting, obeys, and enters the little side oratory, sitting on the embrasure of the window. Hamlet enters, but does not see Ophelia. But, suddenly looking up,

she observes her lover's distress, and naturally enough falls on her knees before the Virgin Mother to implore her intercession for this troubled soul. As Hamlet is rushing out he observes Ophelia. Instantly his whole demeanour changes at the words, "Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered." Hamlet is still going out, but Ophelia calls him. He approaches her tenderly, but remembering his father and his oath his tone changes, and he says in assumed wildness, "No, not I ; I never gave you aught." But the rest of the scene is taken very tenderly. There is a curious emphasis, "Are you honest ?" implying, perhaps, that the wretched creature of destiny wants one honest soul to cling to ; and the "Get thee to a nunnery" is still spoken tenderly, as much as to say,

"Don't rely upon me. I can help you no more. Seek the consolation of religion if you would have any comfort in this world." Hamlet is on the point of embracing Ophelia when he sees Polonius. Then comes the mingled torrent of reproach and hysteria. He rushes from the room, and Ophelia sinks sobbing with her head on the couch. Another revulsion of feeling brings Hamlet back; but instead of covering her hands with kisses, as Edmund Kean did, he quietly kisses one of the tresses of her hair to indicate that poor Ophelia never knows of this parting kiss. This is a beautiful idea, and appears to heighten the tragedy of Ophelia's sad love story. Here is an instance of a poetic inspiration quite within the limits of restricted dramatic art. It is right, it is true, it is effective.

Then came the question, What will Mr. Beerbohm Tree do with the Players and the play scene? What will he hold in his hand? Will he seize a fan of peacock's feathers from Ophelia's hand to toy with and to illustrate the wild, mad, doggerel verses when the King has disappeared "frighted with false fire"? Nothing of the kind. In the scene with the Players Hamlet enters with the MS. of the play, and he retains the precious document during the play scene, using it as a screen or fan to hide his face from the King, as in Maclise's picture again—and gradually rises up the steps of the throne to the King, thrusting the MS. in his face. At the exit, Hamlet, placing his foot upon the throne, throws the parchment sheets of the unfinished play into the air, and then falls hysteri-

cally sobbing on to Horatio's neck. "Leave me, friends," is said with supreme satirical scorn. After the exit of the toadies comes a very new departure. Mr. Tree here introduces a portion of a neglected speech in the fourth act, "How all occasions do inform against me!" Neglected because it is inseparably associated with the Fortinbras sub-plot, which seems impossible. The speech anticipates the humiliation of the mother instead of following it; but Mr. Tree thinks it marks the absolute determination of Hamlet for vengeance. "All, all have left me! Only one remains to strengthen my resolve, my father's spirit." Before leaving, Hamlet stops before the Virgin, crosses himself, and it is to the "Mater Misericordiae" that he addresses the prayer, "O heart, lose not thy nature!"

In the churchyard scene there was a remarkable change. The sombre setting was discarded. We saw a graveyard at the foot of a hill on which sheep are peacefully grazing. It is an early spring morning; the May and the hawthorn trees are in full bloom. Life is poetically contrasted with death. The priest passes across into the church to enable him afterwards to stand in the threshold of the sacred edifice to forbid the entrance of the bier. Mr. Tree adopts the reading "Our son is faint and scant of breath" in the fencing scene, for obvious reasons, and follows Salvini very closely in the difficult interchange of foils. We all remember Salvini's "business" here, recorded in Frank Marshall's admirable *Study of Hamlet*. After Laertes had hit his rival, Hamlet put his hand to his

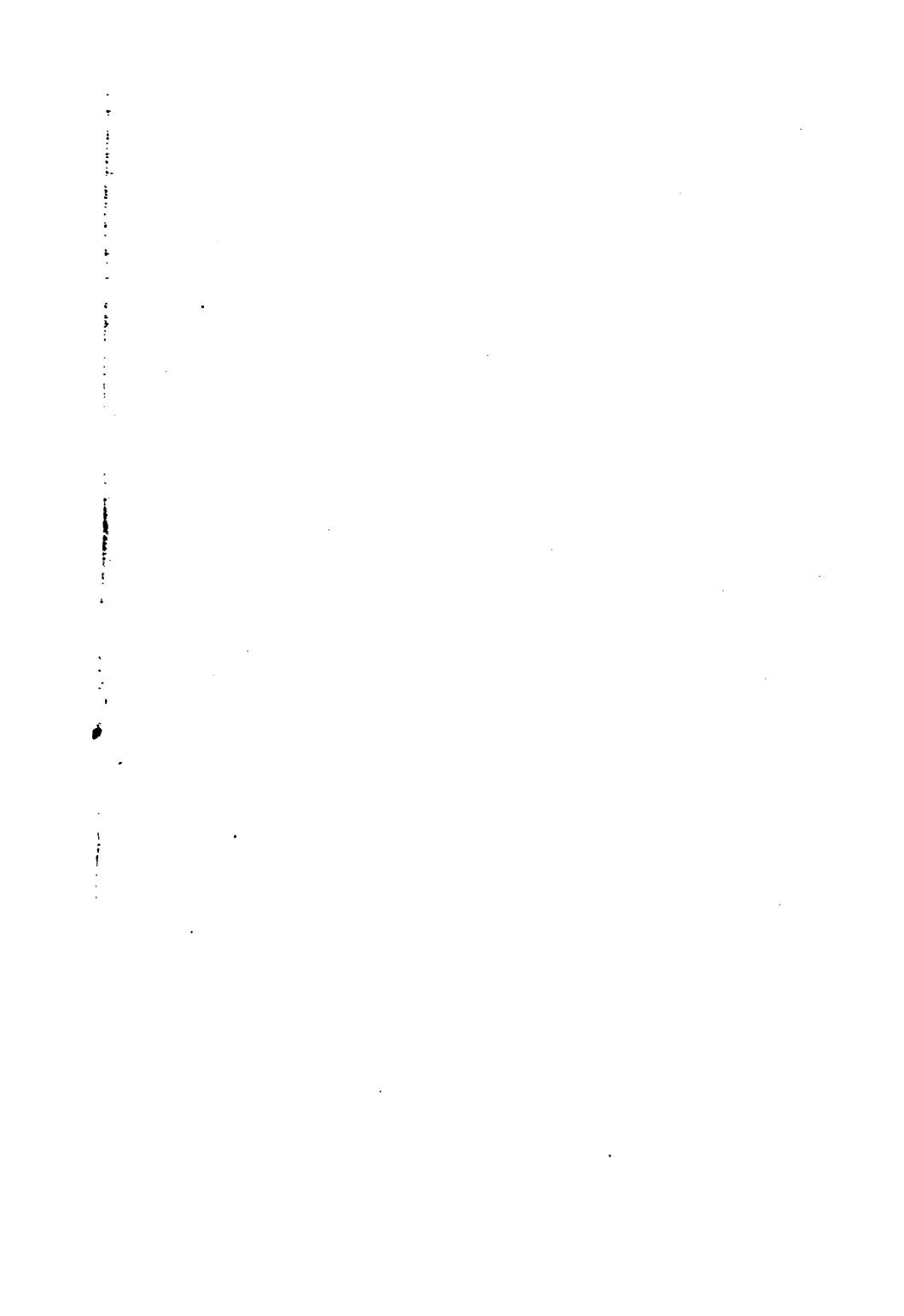
side, as if he felt the prick of the unbated weapon ; then, just as Laertes was about to take up the foil which had been knocked out of his hand in the encounter, Signor Salvini placed his foot upon it and, bowing gracefully, presented his antagonist with his own foil. So Mr. Tree ; but the action is done with ironic, not natural, courtesy. He sees treachery in the face of Laertes. So far as mere "point-making" is concerned there is little more to be said. Mr. Tree adopts Salvini's kiss of Hamlet to Horatio, so justly eulogised by George Henry Lewes as reminding the critic of the "Kiss me, Hardy!" of the dying Nelson, "and this affecting motive," says Lewes, "was represented by an action as novel as it was truthful, namely, the uncertain hand blindly searching for the dear head, and

then faintly closing on it with a sort of final adieu!"

The last words spoken were those of Horatio, "Good night, sweet Prince; and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!" At this moment an angelic choir is heard to faintly echo Horatio's words, "Good night, sweet Prince," which visibly affected the special audience assembled last night, with hearts full and nerves a little overstrained.

All the appointments of the play were in excellent taste, though no very decided scenic effect was aimed at. The scenery and general decorations were as they should be—assistants to the acting, and not overloading or overwhelming it. Next in importance to the Hamlet and Ophelia came the spirited and handsome Laertes of Mr. Fred Terry, who helped

the tragedy at a moment of great danger. Experienced artistes like Miss Rose Leclercq, the Queen; Mr. Fernandez, a Ghost with a fine method of elocution; Mr. Macklin, an admirable King; Mr. Kemble, an interesting Polonius; and both Mr. George Barrett and Mr. Edward Rose, the Gravediggers, were, of course, to be relied on. We missed in Mr. Arthur Dacre's reading that intense sympathy and loveliness which modern actors never seem to see in Horatio, one of the most beautiful characters in all Shakespearian literature; but in return clever acting and good elocution came from Mr. Hudson and Miss Claire Ivanova as the First Actor and the Player Queen.



WILL G. MEIN.



J. FORBES ROBERTSON.

J. FORBES ROBERTSON

1897

## HAMLET

*Lyceum Theatre, September 13, 1897*

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

|                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Hamlet . . . .             | Mr. J. FORRES ROBERTSON. |
| Ophelia . . . .            | Mrs. PATRICK CAMPBELL.   |
| Claudius . . . .           | Mr. H. COOPER CLIFFE.    |
| Ghost . . . .              | „ IAN ROBERTSON.         |
| Polonius . . . .           | „ J. H. BARNES.          |
| Horatio . . . .            | HARRISON HUNTER.         |
| Laertes . . . .            | „ BERNARD GOULD.         |
| Fortinbras . . . .         | „ WHITWORTH JONES.       |
| First Actor . . . .        | „ JAMES HEARNE.          |
| Second Actor . . . .       | „ ELLIOT BALL.           |
| Rosencrantz . . . .        | „ GRAHAME BROWNE.        |
| Guildenstern . . . .       | „ FRANK DYALL.           |
| Osric . . . .              | „ MARTIN HARVEY.         |
| Marcellus . . . .          | „ J. FISHER WHITE.       |
| Bernardo . . . .           | „ CLIFFORD SOAMES.       |
| Francisco . . . .          | „ HUBERT CARTER.         |
| Reynaldo . . . .           | „ ROLAND BOTTOMLEY.      |
| First Gravedigger . . . .  | „ J. WILLES.             |
| Second Gravedigger . . . . | „ LESLIE VICTOR.         |
| Priest . . . .             | „ CHRIS WALKER.          |
| Messenger . . . .          | „ HARRY JOHNSTON.        |
| Gertrude . . . .           | Miss GRANVILLE.          |
| Player Queen . . . .       | Miss SIDNEY CROWE.       |

## J. FORBES ROBERTSON

LYCEUM THEATRE, SEPTEMBER 13, 1897

“**M**Y dear sir, the man was born to play Hamlet!” These were the words of the oldest Shakespearian scholar and critic in that remarkable audience at the Lyceum Theatre on Saturday evening, September 13th, 1897, and they were spoken when Forbes Robertson was only half-way towards the attainment of the brilliant success that he ultimately achieved. Long before he stirred experience to enthusiasm — no small fact where Shakespeare and Hamlet are concerned—he had been pronounced the most human, the most natural, and

in temperament the most lovable of all the Hamlets of our time, English, French, Italian, or German. And is it not true that many of us who have followed the fortunes of the stage for years past have thought very much the same thing, and predicted the same Hamlet, ever since young Forbes Robertson first stepped on the boards of the Princess's Theatre as the romantic and earnest lover of Mary Queen of Scots, down to the days of Arthur Dimsdale in the *Scarlet Letter*, and so with never a failure to the beautiful picture of Buckingham in *King Henry VIII.*? If ever an actor had the inborn spirit of which ideal Hamlets are made, that actor was assuredly Forbes Robertson.

"It is we who are Hamlet," observed Hazlitt in his well-known laconic criti-

cism, and this is the thought that Forbes Robertson so vividly impressed on his enthralled and attentive audience. We all at some time or other have had the pain of burdens thrust on us almost too great to bear. We all, if not exactly religious, have pondered on religion, and wondered in secret, as Hamlet did, of the marvels and mysteries of life, and the awful problem of that "unknown land" that awaits us all. On us destiny has set its seal, and we have had to exchange our boyish, frank, unsuspecting natures for the deep thought, anxiety, the trouble, and the irritability born of disappointment and despair. An Ophelia and a Gertrude and a Claudius—types of love, innocence, and passion—have forced themselves into our lives, and this is the reason we have to thank the

actor and the student for realising to us the truth of Hazlitt's words, "It is we who are Hamlet," for Hamlet is life, Hamlet is love, Hamlet is doubt, Hamlet is embodied nature as it appeals to us all.

The effort, since Fechter first stood on the English stage as Hamlet, to the disgust of the idolisers of the stilted Kemble, Macready, and Phelps schools, has been to free the play of *Hamlet* from its conventionality, tediousness, and staginess. Apart from Salvini, Rossi, Mounet-Sully, and others, who viewed Hamlet from the point of their own idiosyncrasies or temperament, bred of country and nationality, the three recognised intellectual forces who have advocated the natural as opposed to the conventional Hamlet—the Hamlet of the scholar and

student as against the Hamlet of the stage and the actor—have been Fechter, Henry Irving, and Forbes Robertson. Fechter delighted us as Hamlet with his tenderness, his picturesque appearance, his melodious pathos, and in a measure his sentimental love for Ophelia. Henry Irving impressed us with his vivid earnestness, his profound thought, his brilliantly abrupt changes from the suaveness of the courtier to the petulance of the disordered mind. Never before, and never since, have the love scenes with Ophelia and that with the mother, in what is known as the closet scene, been so superbly played as by Henry Irving. For never let it be forgotten that, without presenting a mad Hamlet, or a Hamlet even distantly approaching the insane, it is quite possible, as Henry

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Irving undoubtedly did, to convey to us a nature too weak and irresolute to bear the weight of the grave burdens imposed on it, and a mind temporarily unhinged by that nerve-destroying fatal disease not so much heard of in the Elizabethan as in the Victorian age—worry. Hamlet was assuredly the unfortunate victim of what we moderns call "worry." If he was not "over-worked" he was over-imposed by Fate to accomplish a task too grave for his physical condition. "We have here," says Goethe, "an oak planted in a costly vase, fit only to receive lovely flowers within its bosom; the roots expand, the vase is shattered!" That is worry idealised.

Forbes Robertson brings to his task admirable and invaluable equipments of the actor. His noble voice, capable of

every tone and modulation, is priceless. It can be alternately deep and tender. It reminds one of the moan and wail of the "cello." He does not attempt to make himself fanciful and pretty. He wears his own hair, which so well suits his clear-cut and intellectual countenance, and he does not bedizen himself all over with stars and decorations and coloured orders. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Hamlet looked a little "dowdy" in his suit of rusty black, unadorned and unrelied. But it only emphasised the more the striking force of the face, on which every passion, every doubt, and each anxiety were registered. What, then—apart from new readings, or old readings, or omissions from the text, or what not—were the salient feature of the newest of all new Hamlets? We should

say two things. First, his consummate good breeding, united with frankness of nature and lovable ness of disposition. Secondly, a mind deeply sensitive to religious impression. We can conceive such a Hamlet to have been idolised by his fellow - students—to have been their "chum" and their model of a "down-right good fellow." It is with difficulty that he throws away this boyish impetuosity when confronted with the horror of the situation in which he is involved. Over and over again it bubbles up and bursts the bounds of will-power to subdue it—this keen sense of humour, this desperate, natural, impulsive *joie de vivre*. We have never seen a Hamlet before who has in him such a subtle element of fun or such an appreciation of the whimsical. Where other Hamlets

scowl or snarl, Forbes Robertson only smiles ; not a cynical, cruel, or sarcastic smile, but a smile that lights up his mobile face and seems to say to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, " My dear fellows, you are both humbugs and fawning toadies, but I am too well bred, too much of the prince, to snap at you " ; or, to Polonius, " I should uncommonly like you to know that you are boring me to tears ; but still, you are an officer of the court, a far older man than I, so I must show my contempt for you with a smile instead of with a sneer." There are frequent evidences of this buoyancy of nature united to a supreme courtesy of manner. In the scene where Polonius asks him what he is reading, and in the delivery of the well-known interpolated sentence in the scene with Polonius : " It

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shall to the barber's, with your beard.  
Prythee, say on: he's for a jig or a tale  
of bawdry, or he sleeps."

In the memorable sentences about the camel and the weasel and "very like a whale," the new Hamlet does not show the slightest sign of irritability or contempt. His nature is too sweet to offend anyone, however much a toady or a bore, and he is too well-mannered to condescend to snappishness with his inferiors. This is why the new Hamlet was so beloved at the University and so adored by the players. This vein of cheerfulness and humour, contrasting admirably as it does with the seriousness and introspective side of Hamlet, is carried as far as the opening scene in the churchyard with the Gravediggers, who, we may remark in passing, are about the dullest

and least humorous of delvers who ever joked in a grave. Most Hamlets approach this scene like mutes, and preach out their sentiment as if they were in a pulpit. Not so Forbes Robertson. His banter with the First Gravedigger is in the very lightest vein, and without a doubt these constant waves of brightness and sunshine are of extreme value to the spectator. For ourselves we never remember to have sat out a play of *Hamlet* with less effort or on the whole with more mental enjoyment. Many present, to judge by their enthusiasm and their rapt attention, could have sat it out from end to end all over again. Of how few Hamlets can such a thing be said!

We now come to the second salient feature of the new *Hamlet*, and that is

the religious fervour that evidently underlies the half-distracted mind. We do not say that Hamlet poses as a sanctimonious prig, or anything of the sort, but it is impossible to believe that he has not thought, and thought very deeply, of the "life to come"; that he has not pondered in his own heart of "the dread of something after death," the "undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns." On these solemn things, according to Forbes Robertson, Hamlet has thought very deeply, very earnestly, but with no suspicion of hypocritical cant. The mere touch with the supernatural accentuates these feelings, the communication with a spirit from the dead plays upon his sensitive nature as the wild wind on an Eolian harp, and it adds beauty and significance to the grand

soliloquy on suicide and to countless passages that bring before Hamlet's mind the mysteries of the "unknown land." But if we wanted a pregnant example of Hamlet's philosophical pondering on the inevitable, and Forbes Robertson's exquisite appreciation of it, we have it in one passage which the actor does not preach or grunt at Horatio, but delivers to him earnestly and confidentially, and with that winning smile and the pure mind "half-way to heaven already," as much as to say, "Oh, dear friend, we all ought to think of these things." These are the words, so beautifully spoken, which convey what we call the religious undergrowth in the perplexed mind of Hamlet. They constitute, as we have ever thought, the loveliest passage in the play. "Not a whit! We deny augury:

there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come ; if it be not to come, it will be now ; if it be not now, yet it will come : the readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes ? Let it be ! " And Forbes Robertson follows up this religious idea to the climax in the singularly beautiful death. Hamlet is mortally wounded, and totters feebly to the empty throne. We do not pause to inquire how the actor acquires that deathlike pallor, but it is singularly effective. The finely chiselled face becomes rapt and inspired with a vision of the higher mystery. It is from the throne that Hamlet, weak, pale, and gazing on the golden gates of eternity, says—

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“I cannot live to hear the news from England ;  
But I do prophesy the election lights  
On Fortinbras : he has my dying voice ;  
So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less,  
Which have solicited.”

And then Hamlet, groping in vain for some “dear hand” with feeble fingers—“the uncertain head blindly searching for the dear hand, and then finally closing on it with a sort of final adieu”—and finding no sweet companion for his lonely journey, whispers, still gazing on some unseen seraphic vision, “The rest is silence,” and then passes out alone into the unknown. But this is not all. This prince is dead upon the throne he never filled. Horatio places the crown upon his dead companion’s knees, and Fortinbras enters with his men, and all that is left of the dreamer and philosopher is “lifted

on high by the shouldering crowd, on the battered boss of a shield." The contrast between death and life is admirable. The stage is no longer left as a slaughter-house of corpses, but, as Shakespeare intended it, with the majesty of death asserting itself against a background of martial splendour.

"Take up the bodies, . . .  
Go, bid the soldiers shoot."

We have spoken of the courtliness and grace of the new Hamlet, and alluded very strongly to the fact that the new actor avoids all semblance of irritability and petulance that might destroy his distinction and good breeding. But at the same time we are not blind to the fact that this consistently even tone on the part of Hamlet robs several scenes of their vigour and intensity. The pregnant

passages with Ophelia and with the Queen mother, which were the strongest with Henry Irving, are the weakest with Forbes Robertson. We are inclined to lay the blame, as some have already done, on the unpoetical influence of Ophelia or the inexperience of Gertrude. We ascribe to the horror on the part of the actor the expression of that very irritability which is the first sign of worry and a bewildered brain. He thinks it undignified. But if we are not allowed to see the King peeping from behind the arras where he is concealed, a crafty face instantly seen by Hamlet, but not seen at all by Ophelia, how can we account for the wild and whirling words of Hamlet, or for his change from a lover into fury—now loving, now storming; now gentle, now furious? We maintain

that Hamlet must be irritable and even rude at times to account for his "antic disposition." Why should he be so rash and explosive with Ophelia if he did not know or were not convinced that he was tricked by the King and Polonius, and that Ophelia was a willing decoy duck? And if Hamlet's brain was not overstrained by the play scene, how curt, direct, downright, and unfilial to his mother? No actor can get out of that. There are moments when Hamlet's beautiful nature is warring against itself, and those moments are strongly expressed in the scenes with Ophelia and Gertrude and elsewhere. It will not do to stretch the point of courtesy so far as to suggest that Hamlet was not really in love with Ophelia or angry with his mother, and that on the whole he loved Laertes better

than Horatio. These thoughts certainly do occur to the mind in following the new Hamlet with all its variety, beauty, and charm.

With such a student-Hamlet, some of the omissions and suggestions are so extraordinary. Forbes Robertson reverts to the old business of two pictures embroidered on the arras or painted on the walls to explain "Look here, upon this picture, and on this," instead of the mental pictures which one would have thought would have commended themselves to such a scholar. But, strangest of all, he gives us the King's agonised prayer, "Oh, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven," and omits that wonderful instance of Hamlet's irresolution, the sense of duty conquered by a kind heart, where he proposes to kill the King on his knees.

"Now I might do it pat, now he is praying;  
And now I'll do it."

Few Hamlets would omit that speech, and there is no reason for it, save a scenic change which could be easily managed. The idea that Ophelia's mad scene occurs in a garden is pretty, but nothing comes of it. She does not gather the flowers and herbs from the flower-beds, but brings them on in her lap as of old, bound up with black net or crape. Neither the Ophelia nor Gertrude are striking performances, but they will serve. Mrs. Patrick Campbell substitutes weariness for innocence and indifference for love. The chord of youth is never struck. Her madness is very realistic, but it strikes the note of pain, not pity. Ophelia does not make us weep, but shudder. Her heart is not broken; she is cross,

and too palpably forced upon Hamlet for a state purpose or a court intrigue. We do not feel one beat of Ophelia's heart. Parting from the Prince, or crooning her wild snatches of song over the flowers, she does not tear one tear from the most sympathetic of natures. Claudius and Gertrude are too obviously dressed up. The one looks like the beautiful representation king of hearts on a pack of cards, and the other like Semiramide or a new Cleopatra. They are both, as represented by Mr. H. Cooper Cliffe and Miss Granville, better by far than the kings and queens of old, but we are not convinced that the new idea of youth in sensualist and matron is of much advantage to the play as a whole. It was Wilson Barrett who introduced the conception with Mr. Willard and Miss

Margaret Leighton, but the dire necessity for the alteration has never been pointed out. The Horatio of Mr. Harrison Hunter was incomprehensible. What is the value to any Hamlet of an Horatio who is a prig and a kind of overgrown Osric, an inanimate creature with no trace of sympathy in his composition? Some Hamlets purposely select colourless Horatios, because a good Horatio is too similar to Hamlet in temperament, and consequently detracts from the success of the Prince of Denmark. But Forbes Robertson is not an actor of that pattern, and knows that the better Horatio is played the better it is for Hamlet. But to counteract this we had an excellent Laertes in that sound and accomplished artist Mr. Bernard Gould, and the result was that the scene between Hamlet and

Laertes at the grave was one of the best-acted and most vigorous moments of the play. Here Hamlet awoke from the dreamer into the man of action ; and the torrent of "rant," which was not rant at all, but the natural relief to an imprisoned nature, brought down the house. An excellent Polonius was found in Mr. J. H. Barnes, who was no senile dodderer, but a man who had been in earlier years a bit of a scholar and student himself, but who had the habitual tendency of old men to bore their juniors with reminiscences of old-world sentiments. Vanity, the root of most madness, had worked its will with the brain of Polonius. The Ghost of Mr. Ian Robertson was distinguished for its evenness of elocution and for its grim mystery of tone and idea. The Osric of Mr. Martin Harvey was

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just what it should be, perky, affected, and inoffensive ; and it is seldom that the words of the Player Queen are better spoken than by Miss Sidney Crowe, a clever and promising daughter of an accomplished mother.

Adequately, tastefully, but not extravagantly mounted, the play marched to success from the instant the curtain rose, and it fell in good time, finding the audience still alert, stimulated, and intellectually craving for more. The silly cry has gone forth that the drama which appeals to the mind is dead, and that its constituency is disfranchised. It is untrue ; if it were not so no young Hamlet could appeal to an audience that literally hung on every word and sentence, and would not allow a murmur or a whisper to interfere with that supreme

silence of interest on which the popular actor commented with thanks when all was over. The drama that is dead is the drama of sublimated conceit. Yes, there are students of the higher drama, students of Shakespeare, students of the greatest tragedy and philosophical treasure ever written. Lucky the students of 1897 to be able to boast in long after years that they first studied Hamlet at the feet of such a scholar and artist, such a natural actor, as Forbes Robertson!



## **APPENDIX**

**HENRY IRVING**

**1885**

## HAMLET

*Lyceum Theatre, May 2, 1885*

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

|                    |   |   |   |                   |
|--------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| Hamlet             | . | . | . | Mr. HENRY IRVING. |
| Claudius           | . | . | , | WENMAN.           |
| Polonius           | . | . | , | H. HOWE.          |
| Laertes            | . | . | , | GEO. ALEXANDER.   |
| Horatio            | . | . | , | TYARS.            |
| Osrice             | . | . | , | MARTIN HARVEY.    |
| Rosencrantz        | . | . | , | NORMAN FORBES.    |
| Guildenstern       | . | . | , | PERCY LYNDAL.     |
| Marcellus          | . | . | , | C. HARBUS.        |
| Bernardo           | . | . | , | BENN.             |
| Francisco          | . | . | , | CLIFFORD.         |
| First Player       | . | . | , | LOWTHER.          |
| Second Player      | . | . | , | ARCHER.           |
| Priest             | . | . | , | CARTER.           |
| First Gravedigger  | . | . | , | S. JOHNSON.       |
| Second Gravedigger | . | . | , | GURNEY.           |
| Ghost              | . | . | , | TOM MEAD.         |
| Gertrude           | . | . | . | Mrs. PAUNCEFORT.  |
| Player Queen       | . | . | . | Miss FOSTER.      |
| Ophelia            | . | . | . | Miss ELLEN TERRY. |

## HENRY IRVING

LYCEUM THEATRE, MAY 2, 1885

THE first appearance of Mr. Henry Irving at "the old house at home," after his second lengthened and triumphantly successful journey through America, was a memorable evening in theatrical annals; for he distinguished himself in a double sense: first as a master of his art, and secondly as an astute diplomatist.

It must be well known by this time that the manager of the Lyceum determined to inaugurate his new era of management by an innovation which he hoped and believed would be a distinct

benefit to the public. Mr. Irving arranged that from a certain date every seat at the Lyceum could be booked beforehand without any preparatory fee whatever. The humblest occupant of a pit or gallery seat was to be in precisely as good a position as his wealthier neighbour in boxes or stalls. In order to carry out the new idea no expense was spared, for no more unselfish act has ever graced the history of modern management. The pit and gallery had to be reseated throughout in a thoroughly luxurious fashion, thereby curtailing the paying space, and adding materially to the cost of labour and attendance. Mr. Irving's tentative plan for avoiding confusion, preventing disorder, and greatly benefiting women playgoers who are unable to undergo the fatigue and danger

of a crush, was met in no unbecoming spirit by his faithful supporters in the pit. They looked at the reform in a thoroughly common-sense and practical fashion. They found that the crush which had hitherto taken place on the afternoon of a first night was suddenly transferred to the early hours of the morning, when the box-office was open, and it was argued that a crush at five o'clock in the afternoon to get into the pit is, on the whole, more convenient than a crush at five o'clock in the morning to secure seats in order to avoid a crush. To such a contention Mr. Irving could no doubt have advanced the argument of chivalry and a generous defence of women, because the male pittite who struggled to the doors at night could only secure a seat for himself, whilst a

struggle at the box-office might secure places for the female members of his family, and save them from the discomforts of cold, rain, and the many inconveniences of a crowd.

There was much speculation as to the results of the "new pit" on the first night. Down to a certain hour all went off well. All the pittites who had secured seats presented themselves in good time. Long before the people in the stalls had come every seat in the pit was occupied, and there was not a whisper of discontent throughout the evening. Mr. Irving's first appearance was hailed with a cheer as loud, as hearty, and as full of welcome as ever greeted him in his theatre. Another shout shook the house when Miss Ellen Terry appeared as Ophelia. A pin might have been heard to drop

at any period of the play from the first appearance of Marcellus and Bernardo to the death of Hamlet.

The curtain had scarcely fallen a second before Mr. Irving, Miss Terry, and the company were called out to be cheered again, and then came the usual demand for a speech. Mr. Irving proceeded to speak only with momentary interruptions of good-humoured encouragement. No one could have believed that there were two opinions on the pit question. In his well-known, cheery fashion, Mr. Irving expressed his gratification at being home again; he once more repeated the inevitable compliments to America and American audiences for what they had done in the way of welcome to himself and his company; and then very delicately he approached the question of the new

pit. At once out burst a storm. It had been pent up and restrained under extreme tension, but now down it came. There was evidently anything but a unanimous opinion on Mr. Irving's reform of convenience. The partisans of the "new pit" cheered the smiling manager to the echo; the doughty supporters of the "old pit" yelled their companions down. No one could say whether the "ayes" or the "noes" had it. Mr. Irving did not risk the experiment of calling for a show of hands. Three hearty cheers were given for the new pit; three cheers as hearty were given for the old. Mr. Irving, as calm as a judge, merely smiled, and protested again and again, in excellent temper, that what had been done was done with the laudable motive of assisting the public good, and that it

should be all undone directly the public voice voted for the abolition of booking. This fair offer, however, did not allay the storm. Some spokesmen, for one cause or another, strove to address the manager, but they were all shouted down or cheered into silence. At last Mr. Irving bethought him of a Shakespearian sentence to cause peace. A happier thought has seldom occurred to a manager in a dilemma. It was exactly the right quotation to make, and it redounds to Mr. Irving's credit and tact that it was made. "So, gentlemen," said the Hamlet transformed into manager, "with all my love I do commend one to you; and what so poor a man as Hamlet is may do, to express his love and friending to you, God willing, shall not lack." To such a graceful and courteous utterance as that there

could be but one reply — the heartiest sound of cheers that the whole evening afforded. Mr. Irving retired the evident winner in the encounter, and the great pit question was left to be decided by time.

Let us turn now to the performance of Hamlet, and the new vigour that was imported into Mr. Irving's acting. This was a matter of general remark, and it was endorsed by those who have watched Mr. Irving's career from the outset. He never played Hamlet better, never nearly so well. The old rule was reversed. America sent us back a better actor than the one who left our shores. The voice had gained in mellowness and strength, and it was perfectly under command ; the movements of the actor were less nervous and restrained ; the attitudes were uni-

formly graceful and appropriate, and the old peculiarities of manner had almost wholly disappeared. There was no beating of the foot on the stage in moments of agitation, unknown perhaps to the actor, but only too apparent to the audience ; the scenes with Ophelia were free from those artistic blemishes that once were only too conspicuous ; no one kept harping on Mr. Irving's walk, or pronunciation, or eccentricity, because they never obtruded themselves on critical consideration. That these signs of a marked style and a rare individuality have from the first been signalled out for far too contemptuous satire, and never fairly weighed against the actor's admitted genius, I had always earnestly protested ; but it was now a sincere pleasure to all to find that the advice of the player in *Hamlet* can

be so properly and conscientiously given by Hamlet himself. It has been well observed that no familiarity breeds contempt in connection with this noble play. No one can ever see it or read it without discovering some new beauties for observation and study. In this revival Mr. Irving had enlarged, rounded off, and polished his original conception of Hamlet. He added to it the rich result of a matured intelligence and a ripened understanding. That which once was dim and shadowy was now distinct; that which was once attractively interesting was now dominantly beautiful. He brought out far more clearly than before his view of the intensely affectionate nature of Hamlet, and showed how this exquisite sensitiveness is a main factor in the wreck of his life. The new Hamlet who loved more

than his father. His whole life and soul were not buried with the departed majesty of Denmark. He loves Horatio, and never loses an opportunity of showing it ; he leans towards him and upon him. He is in Hamlet's eyes the embodiment of human sympathy. He loves his mother in spite of the injury she has done him : see how he clings to her even when he has upbraided her, when he discovers that he has wrung her heart and is in mental torture. But best of all he loves Ophelia. How few Hamlets show this ! They bully, they rave at, they ill-treat her, and curse her. They do not love her. In the "nunnery" scene they are violent, tempestuous, angry, noisy, and stagey ; they are seldom princely and chivalrous to a woman they have loved. This was Mr. Irving's finest acting scene, assisted

as it was by an Ophelia as full of sensibility as himself.

Ophelia, in Hamlet's eyes, according to Mr. Irving, is the last spar to which his wretched and much-haunted life clings. She might save him, but Ophelia gone he must battle with the waves of destiny as best he can. He approaches her with infinite tenderness, his hand hardly daring to touch hers, but every muscle in his body vibrating with emotion. He loves, but he dares not. He has to part, but he will not show what that parting means. He is upset, depressed, suspicious, fretful, wilful, but he cannot storm against this "lily maid" who stands trembling before him. He bids her go to a nunnery, not like a petulant boy, but as a reflective philosopher and a prince. "We are arrant knaves all: believe none of us." And

even when Hamlet sees the half-concealed Polonius, the discovery does not aggravate his temper, but adds bitterly to his sorrow. The words, "Where's your father?" are spoken with the tears welling up to the eyes. There is no grief greater to man than deceit in the woman he has loved ; no mental anguish is so exquisitely keen. From this the broken-down and dejected Hamlet rushes into sarcasm, bitterness, into tears and reproaches, but never into bullying. He dares not tear Ophelia from his heart, but he must. This is the supreme sacrifice. His last attitude is to fall at her feet and kiss her hand. This is prophetic enough of the after utterances, "I loved Ophelia ; forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up my sum." But henceforward he must be alone, and he rushes from her

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presence haunted and hunted by despair which is to "o'ercrow his spirit," and to hurry him on from trouble to death! The play scene had also materially gained in strength, and the business of the scene was considerably altered. Hamlet's excitement stops the play long before the King is "frighted with false fire." The curtain drops, the courtiers crowd round the prostrate Prince, who crawls nearer and nearer to the steps of the throne, in order to throw his insults in his uncle's face. The effect of leaping on the empty throne was as fine as ever, but far finer than before the "subsidence of emotion" in the murder scene, where the fierceness of invective and satire were never shown with keener force or with more refined polish.

And so it would be possible to run

on, did space permit, over the renewed strength of Mr. Irving's Hamlet down to the death, when his loving nature is shown in his last farewell to his beloved and constant friend. We have here the suggestion of the embrace without its realisation, the hunger for love down to the last moment that life lasts.

What more can be said than has already been written of the Ophelia of Miss Ellen Terry?\* It was a poetical conception of

\* In 1879, speaking of Miss Terry's Ophelia, Mr. Scott said in the *Daily Telegraph*: "It was a case of art assisting art. The actor played better as the actress realised the scene to perfection. Ophelia looked like a broken lily; she was a 'Niobe all tears.' This was no simulated grief. The actress had entered into the soul of Ophelia's despair; she sobbed as Ophelia would have sobbed; she bent like a ruined flower before the tempest of her lover's hysterical execration. Miss Terry's Ophelia in the fourth act is the perfection of refined, thoughtful, and poetical acting. The vacant expression in the eye, the exquisite modulation of voice, the wondrously effective wail of those minor melodies, the grace of movement, and the

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the highest moment. The mad scene was faultless, a most fantastic study, but unlike most Ophelias. Miss Terry assisted Hamlet in that difficult love scene in which, as a rule, Hamlet is everything and Ophelia a lay figure. The unconventional and excellent Polonius of Mr. Howe, the dignified and sonorous King of Mr. Wenman, the familiar Queen of Mrs. Pauncefort, and the capital Horatio of Mr. Tyars all added to the beauty and

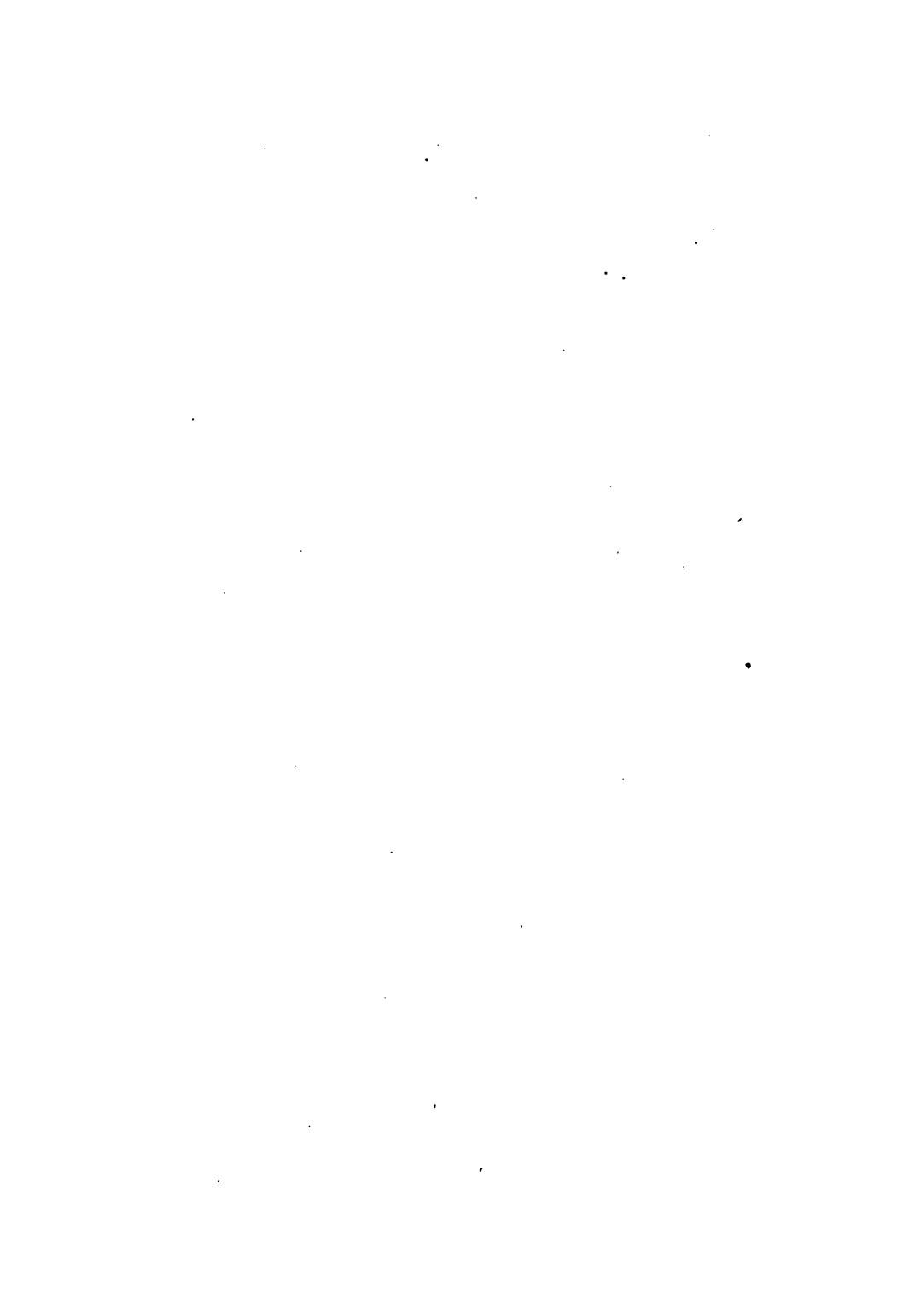
marked maidenliness of this Ophelia, mark it as a creation which will long live in the memory."

Four years later (1883) Mr. Scott again praised Miss Terry's performance of the character as follows : "Miss Ellen Terry gave us an Ophelia such as has not been seen on the stage since her talented elder sister played the part with such marked success. A more tenderly plaintive or ideally pathetic rendering of the sweet, mad girl cannot be imagined ; and the entrance of Ophelia in her clinging white robe, her fair, clustering hair, and a lily branch in her hand, will be an abiding memory. A better Ophelia it would be difficult to find, if Ophelia is to be played as Shakespeare wrote and imagined the character."

completeness of this remarkable representation of Shakespeare's masterpiece ; but very special mention should be made of the Laertes of Mr. George Alexander and the Osric of Mr. Martin Harvey, who gave a reading of the part that may be highly commended. Osric, with his pleasant voice and refined manner, was affected and silly without ceasing to be a courtier.



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